

FENRIS
THE WOLF

PERCY MACKAYE

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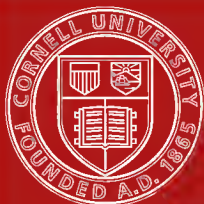
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FENRIS, THE WOLF



FENRIS, THE WOLF

A TRAGEDY

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

AUTHOR OF "THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMS"

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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TO
NORMAN HAPGOOD
CRITIC AND FRIEND

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE invocation of Ingimund to Odin, on page 38, is adapted from Fragments of a Spell Song, preserved as an insertion in the Great Play of the Wolsungs, and to be found, both original and translation, in the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale* of Vigfusson and Powell, Oxford, 1883.

For dramatic reasons, various liberties have been taken by the writer with those elements of this play which are drawn from Scandinavian mythology. For example, according to mythology, the Fenris-wolf is the offspring, not of Odin, but of Loki; the wolf and Baldur are not brothers; no mention is made of the wolf's Pack. Moreover, in the Old Icelandic utterances of the Pack — for purposes of sound merely — a preterite form has twice been used for a present tense, as in *Ulfr sofnathi*, "the wolf sleepeth."

Where authenticity, however, has harmonised with the dramatic idea, it has equally been the writer's aim.

CORNISH, N.H., March, 1905.

CHARACTERS

OF THE PROLOGUE

ODIN
BALDUR
THOR
LOKI
FENRIS
FENRIS'S PACK
FREYJA

OF THE PLAY

INGIMUND, *Priest of Odin*
EGIL, *a Hunter*
ARFI, *a Dwarf, his brother*
YORUL, *liegeman of Egil*
ROLF, *liegeman of Egil*
ERIC, *liegeman of Egil*
WULDOR, *liegeman of Arfi*
A LITTLE BOY
THORDIS, *daughter of Ingimund and priestess of
Odin's temple*
FRIDA, *one of her Virgins*
A LITTLE GIRL

FOLK, PRIESTS, VIRGINS, CHILDREN

SCENES

- THE PROLOGUE. *The crater of a volcano ; dawn.*
- ACT FIRST. SCENE I. *The rune-stone of Odin, outside a
tribal temple ; morning.*
- SCENE II. *Egil's lodge in the forest ; tow-
ard twilight.*
- ACT SECOND. SCENE I. *A prison chamber ; day.*
- SCENE II. *The same ; night.*
- ACT THIRD. *A forest glade ; the pool of
Freyja ; early morning.*
- ACT FOURTH. *The rune-stone again ; sunset.*

TIME AND PLACE

*The Age of Northern Mythology ; Iceland. The incidents of
the play are conceived as taking place within the cycle of
a year.*

THE PROLOGUE

THE PROLOGUE

Foreground — a frozen crater

*At back, a cavern. Overhanging this, at left and back,
snow-cruled cliffs, partly bared by the winds, stand out
against the stars.*

*On one of these, ODIN seated; on his shoulders, two ravens.
Beneath him, in the crater and cavern, half-discernible,
FENRIS and his PACK.*

ODIN

He sleeps, yet restive still; with eyelids squint
Through which his eyes, in dreams still shifting, flash
Like flame through knot-holes. Yet he sleeps; beside
him

His wild pack, crouching, share his chain. — A lull:
Betwixt moonset and sunrise, one at least,
One lull in that insensate harsh defiance,
The beast-night-barking of my wolfish son.
You stars! Fenris is quiet. Now the dew
May fall in silence, now the mountain birds
Nest silent by the unawakened morning,
The wide dark fold its wings and dream. Now peace,
The infinite soliloquy of thought,
Descends on Odin.

[*A silent pause, during which the first pale signs of dawn appear on the crags. Odin whispers to the ravens on his shoulders and they fly away. He sits motionless and serene.*]

THE PACK

[*Slumbrously.*]

Ulfr! Ulfr sofnathi!

ODIN

[*Gazes again on FENRIS.*]

That this dread should breathe!
 And yon beast born from out my loins — to me,
 To me, that from this forehead plucked an eye
 To pawn for Mimi's knowledge. — Wisdom, truth,
 Beauty, and law, the tranquil goals of mind,
 All these had I attained, and I a god;
 Yet on the lank, alluring hag of Chaos
 Begat this son, this living fang.

THE PACK

[*Slumbrously.*]

Ulfr! Ulfr sofnathi!

ODIN

O thou
 Dumb spirit of the mind! O mystery!
 Were there a god whom Odin might invoke,
 To thee would Odin sue for pity. — Ages,
 A thousand ages, anguish;
 Anguish, remorse, forgiveness, malediction,

Light into darkness, horror into hope,
 Revolving evermore. — O pain, O pain,
 Sear not my spirit blind! — Thou, tameless wolf,
 God of the void eternal retrograde,
 Prone deity of self, by that thou art —
 Illimitable passion, joyance mad
 Of being, hate, brute-cunning, gnawing lust,
 Fenris, I curse thee.

[*Fenris wakes.*]

THE PACK

[*Wildly.*]

Ulfr! Ulfr vaknathi!

FENRIS

Father!

ODIN

Still that name!

FENRIS

Father!

ODIN

Fenris, my son, forgive me.

FENRIS

Fetch Fenris Freyja.

ODIN

Bastard wolf,

Be silent.

FENRIS

Baldur, my brother's bride betrothèd,
Freyja, fetch me.

ODIN

Still no longing but 'tis lust,
No aspiration but 'tis appetite.

FENRIS

Anarch! anarch! anarch! Father, free me!

ODIN

Free thee, thou poor antagonist. Knowest thou
Not yet why thou art chained? Retarded thing,
Emancipate thyself! What might it avail
Though Odin burst these links and loosed thee?—
Thou
Thyself art thine own bondage and thy pain.

THE PACK

Ulfr! Ulfr!

FENRIS

Anarch! anarch! Ulfr!

ODIN

Yet could'st thou show some genesis of good,
Some spring of growth. Hadst thou, in all these ages,
Waxed toward my stature imperceptibly
Even as the seed, that germinates in darkness,
Feels toward the sky; yea, hadst thou now one pale
Potential spark of godhood, nobler desire,
Evolving intellect, one lineal trait

To prove that upward through thy brutish heart
Yearns infinite Reason, even now, poor son,
Would I strike off these fetters, set thee free,
Thee and thy pack, and put my hope in time.

THE PACK

Heil! Heil, Othinn!

FENRIS

Fenris! Free him.

ODIN

But lo! instead, what art thou? Ye faint stars,
Before you close your eyes in day, once more
Behold him! Ye icy craters and hoar caves,
Thou solitary dawn, eternal sky,
Perennial snows — you timeless presences,
Behold your consummation: this, even this,
Is Odin's elder son, creation's heir!

FENRIS

Anarch! anarch! anarch! anarch! anarch!

[Odin, covering his face, turns away and disappears behind the crag. Fenris, with his pack, retires into the cavern, dragging his chain. Outside BALDUR is heard singing, joined, in chorus, by the voices of nature on whom he calls.]

BALDUR

Flushing peak, fainting star,
Freyja!
Torches in thy temple are,
Freyja!

Spirits of air,
Anses and elves,
Brightens the dawn,
Freyja is gone.
Come! let us go to her, girding ourselves.

CHORUS

Freyja, where art thou?
Where? Where?

[FREYJA enters, looking fearfully around her.]

FREYJA

Those giant beards and backs! — They turn and look.
The peaks pursue me, and the nudging cliffs
Thrust out great chins and stare. Where should this
lead?

BALDUR

[*Outside.*]

Mortal day, man's desires,
Freyja!
Feed on earth thine altar-fires,
Freyja!
Spirits of earth,
Wood-sprites and Wanes,
Gone is our mirth,
Sorrow remains.
Come! let us hasten and bid her beware!

CHORUS

Freyja, where art thou?
Where? Where?

FREYJA

Can this place be i' the world? And were such
shapes
Wrought in the dear creation? And that voice —
Was it this crater's frozen mouth that moaned
For blossoms and the south wind and my love?

BALDUR

[*Enters.*]

Freyja!

FREYJA

O Baldur, come!

BALDUR

What hast thou seen?
Why hast thou left the silver roof of shields,
Thy lover's eyes, the laughter of the gods,
To wander forth in night?

FREYJA

Barkings I heard.

BALDUR

Hush, Freyja!

FREYJA

Through the music of the gods
Faintly I heard it knell and yearn for me;
And so I stole away. But tell me —

BALDUR

Come!

FREYJA

Tell me what thing of nameless woe —

BALDUR

Oh, come

And ask not. Come away to Valhal.

[He leads her impetuously away from the crater toward the sunrise.]

FREYJA

[Resists gently.]

Baldur !

BALDUR

Freyja, look down ! Spring leaps among the valleys
And calls his universal flocks, to drink

The love of Freyja.

The forests rush together and the groves,
And the male oaks, like herded elk at war,
Tangle their budding antlers, and moan loud
For Freyja's love.

Look down ! The silvered pastures and the lakes
Lift all their sacrificial clouds, to crave

The love of Freyja ;

And day's bright stallion, snorting in the east,
Paws the pale stream of morning into gold
And champs his golden curb to burning foam
For Freyja's love.

[He draws her farther away.]

FREYJA

But if *one* yearn in vain —

[*The rattle of Fenris's manacles echoes in the crater.*]

THE PACK

Ulfr! Ulfr vaknathi!

FREYJA

Listen! They cry —
“The wolf awakeneth!” What wolf? And why
That clang of steel?

BALDUR

His chain.

FREYJA

[*In dreadful wonder.*]

But *he*?

BALDUR

A beast
Untamed and tameless. — Ask not with thine eyes! —
Fenris, my brother.

FREYJA

[*Springs joyfully toward the crater.*]

Ah!

BALDUR

[*Stays her.*]

Where art thou going?

FREYJA

To greet my lover's kindred. Were it not well?

BALDUR

Oh, would it were ! Look not ; this kin is monstrous.

FREYJA

Is it not a god as we ?

BALDUR

It is a god,
Freyja, but not as we. — It is the wolf-god,
Lord of the dumb and kithless wild, that live
To breed and kill their forms of dreadful beauty —
A vacant sacrifice to him : the doe,
That stills all night her knocking heart, to hear
The wood-cat's footfall, breathes mute prayer to
Fenris ;
The frothing stag, that blazons the black boar
With gules of death, bruits hymns to Fenris ; yet
Their pangs assuage him not, for he himself
Remains the abject deity of lust,
His rites, the stretched claw and the stiffened mane ;
His priest — a sated fang ; his altar — fear.

FREYJA

But why makes he his sanctuary thus
Lonely in desolation ?

BALDUR

'Tis the will
Of Odin. Ask no more. This cleft he chose
Wherein to hide the secret woe of the world,
That never thou shouldst look upon its face.

I ?
FREYJA
BALDUR
Thou, O maiden ! Thou art the hope of the world.
FENRIS
Freyja !
FREYJA
He calls me.
FENRIS
Freyja !
FREYJA
Hark ! He yearns
For me !
BALDUR
[*Urging her away.*]
'Tis Odin's will.
FENRIS
Freyja !
FREYJA
He cries
In pain. Hold me no longer. — Fenris !
ODIN
[*Entering, intercepts her path with his spear.*]
Stay !
FREYJA
Allfather ! hark his pain. Alas, poor wolf !

ODIN

Poor wolf ? Poor world ! poor blind, precarious Reason,
Beneath whose sovereign throne this horror sits,
Cat-crouching to usurp it. — Fear him ; go !

FENRIS

Ai ! ai ! anarch ! Freyja !

FREYJA

He yearns for me. Am I not beautiful ?
Am I not holy ? Wherefore should I fear ?
All living things love Freyja ; gods and men,
Anses and elves and helpless animals.
Where I walk glittering, there lovers press
And consecrate their eyes and beat their hearts
Like moths against the moon. And shall I go
Nor smile once kindly on him ? Even the moon
Is kinder to her loves.

ODIN

He craves no smile
From thee, nor ever smiled into the face
Of love since his birth-hour. He lusts for thee.

FREYJA

Why should he not ? Hath Odin never lusted ?
What mind that knows the lust of intellect
Shall mock desire ? Ah ! Who that ever yearned,
Yearned not in ignorance ?

BALDUR

Have pity, father !

ODIN

[*To Freyja.*]

Child, pitiest thou this thing?

FREYJA

Hath not its voice
Cried out immortally and craved me? Pity?
Love is a kind of pity for itself
That longs so endlessly. Allfather, never
Ere now hast thou gainsaid me.

ODIN

Yet must now!
This bitterness is mine alone to bear.
O Freyja! O my Baldur! You of all
The creatures of my will, bright lovers, you
Only are happy. Be so still. Depart!
Forget these wolvisish cries; seek not to help
Evil unsolvable.

FREYJA

What then is evil,
That lovers may not solve it?

ODIN

[*His face turning wistful with a beautiful light, lifts his
obstructive spear, and stands from the path.*]

Hope of the world!

FENRIS

Freyja!

ODIN

Behold !

[He watches with the look of wistfulness as Freyja and Baldur, springing to the brink of the crater, gaze down upon Fenris.]

FREYJA

Ah me !

BALDUR

Fenris, my brother !

FREYJA

O pain ! Why dost thou look upon me so ?

FENRIS

Fair art, Freyja ; shalt Fenris fear not ?

FREYJA

What wouldst thou ?

FENRIS

Lithe thy limbs are ; lief am to lie with thee.

FREYJA

Are these snows thy dwelling-place ?
No flowers grow here. Take these.

[Freyja lets fall some of her flowers into the crater.]

FENRIS

[Tearing them, as the Pack yells.]

Anarch ! anarch !

FREYJA

[*Drawing back.*]

Alas !

BALDUR

Peace, brother !

FREYJA

Thou lovest me. Why, then, art thou not glad ?

FENRIS

Chafe, choke me, chains ; chaffeth the churl at me !

FREYJA

Take heart ; we come to bring thee peace. O Baldur !

[*Clinging to Baldur, she gazes with fascinated awe upon Fenris, who, pacing ever in and out, amid his involving Pack, with the swift, incessant shuttle movement of a caged wild thing, upturns his shifting eyes in yearning.*]

FENRIS

Free me, Freyja ; frore am I, frost-bit,
Go we together into greenwood glad.
Mirk under moon-mist mad will meet thee,
Hunt thee from hiding, thy heart-beats hear !
Press thee, panting !

THE PACK

Ulfr ! Ulfr !

FENRIS

Bite — bark at thee —

THE PACK

Ulfr ! Ulfr !

FENRIS

Miles, miles, miles !

FREYJA

[*To Baldur.*]

He loves me, yet his looks are terrible.
He saw me, yet he smiled not. Flowers I gave him,
But he destroyed them. Sorrowful he is,
Yet hath no tears in his eyes. — What shall we do ?

FENRIS

Free me, Freyja ; fair art thou, froward —
Go we together into greenwood glad.
Burns thine eyebeam bright as the bitch-wolf's,
Longeth Fenris in thy lair to lie ;
Longeth to chase thee.

THE PACK

Ulfr ! Ulfr !

FENRIS

Chafe, champ thee —

THE PACK

Ulfr ! Ulfr !

FENRIS

Leave thee with child.

FREYJA

Baldur, what reeling darkness snows around us
From heaven? The rose of dawn is stung with blight.

ODIN

[*Aside.*]

O mystery! O will behind the will,
How shall this end?

BALDUR

From heaven no darkness falls;
It is the glamour of his woeful eyes,
That spet the night within them.

FREYJA

[*Half wildly, whispers at Baldur's ear.*]

It must cease!

The shy bird hath his song within the wood,
The shepherd's call is sweet along the hills,
To husband and to lover are the sounds
Of gracious voices in the home places, —
To *him*, the ceaseless clanging of his chain.

BALDUR

O Freyja, we will minister to him,
Until for him the shy bird's song is sweet,
And sweet the shepherd's call along the hills.
Fenris!

[*Swinging from the brink of the crater, he lets himself down.
As he descends, Fenris springs toward him to the limit
of his chain.*]

FENRIS

Hail, Baldur! hail, brother! Boast thy beauty
now;

Woo now and wive thee, welcome to Fenris' woe.

All elf-gifts thou asked Odin gave thee,

Sunlight, summer, song for solace,

Fair face, freedom, Freyja to friend.

Me what gave he? Mark! — Mountain-mist, mad-
ness,

Monstrous made me, marr'd, wolf-masked,

Cramped in snow-crater, frost-crusted, chained;

Numb, naked, night-winds gnaw me,

Blistereth black ice, biteth my bones.

BALDUR

Thou shalt be free.

FENRIS

Me mocketh, mocketh! Ai!

BALDUR

Fenris, my brother, hear me!

I bring thee freedom.

FENRIS

[Holding out his chain to Baldur.]

Liest; — loose me!

BALDUR

Hush! I know the secret

How thou mayst slip these shackles. I have learned

From Odin how he binds thee. Wilt thou hear?

FENRIS

[*Craftily beckoning Baldur under the shadow of a cleft.*]

Tss! Wise is the One-Eyed. Tss! read me thy riddle now.

BALDUR

Know then, O Fenris, Odin of himself
Is weak to hold thee. Of his kin, another
Conniveth with him.

FENRIS

Kin, sayst?

BALDUR

Thou, his son. Thou forgest
Chains stubbornner than Odin's, links of lust
Mightier than these of steel, which are themselves
The might of these thou wearest. O my brother,
Lay off thine own, and Odin's shall be straw.

FENRIS

Thus readest thy riddle?

BALDUR

Thus findest thou freedom: do our father's will.
His law is wisdom. All the folk of heaven
And earth and hell obey him gladly; thou —
Submit thou also; make thine oath to Odin.

FENRIS

Oathless be Odin; am I earth's overlord!

[*Odin beckons to the eastward with his spear. From the distance comes a flash of fire and faint thunder.*]

BALDUR

Hush, brother, hush ! He hears ; for thy pain's sake
Remember he is Allfather. Be meek.

FENRIS

Am I Asa's heir ! — I — I — I am Allfather !

[By a dazzling river of light and thunder-peal, the whole scene is riven. On the peaks at either side appear LOKI and THOR. Loki holds in his hand a serpentine whip of many lashes, as of glittering brass ; Thor, a white hammer. The Pack cower, moaning ; Fenris stands glaring, with head bent backward as in sudden pain.]

ODIN

Hail, Loki ! Welcome, Thor ! in happy time.
Are ye not come to crown me Odin the Wise ?
Shake out the live scorn of thy withering laughter,
Loki, over the world : Odin hath been defied !
Hammer it, Thor, on the clanged doors of hell,
Till their intestine thunders toll our doom —
“The wolf shall sit alone, at Valhal's feast,
And eat of Odin's heart !”

FREYJA

Alas ! What words !

ODIN

This is mine heir. Hath it not spoken ? This
Shall sit one day in Odin's seat. Mine heir !
The heir of all the gods. Behold then, gods,
How this, your prince, receives his tutelage.

BALDUR

Father, what wilt thou do?

ODIN

Tame him, the tameless ;
The eternal goad against the eternal stone.
Yea, though I tame him not till doomsday darken.

[*To Loki.*]

Loosen thy scourge.

[*Held by his chain, Fenris flees wildly in circles, and seeking to hide himself, finally crouches in terror, centre. He is prevented from entering the cavern by Thor, who stands there.*]

FENRIS

Anarch! Ai! anarch! Anarch! Ulfr! Ulfr!

BALDUR AND FREYJA

Have pity!

ODIN

Pity ask

Of him; this wolf must reign or I. Strike, Loki!
Let thy bright lashes scorch with all their snakes
Till the live, brassy serum eats and crawls
Into the writhing blood. Begin!

BALDUR AND FREYJA

Have mercy!

[*As Loki swings his whip of fire, the Pack beneath fall on their faces. Amid them Fenris crouches at half stature. Baldur and Freyja kneel as frozen, with lifted hands toward Odin. Thus in sudden twilight and silence, fine silent lashes of unintermittent lightning uncoil and coil, as the scourge is whirled, around the cringing body of the wolf. A shudder only reveals his extreme pangs.*]

ODIN

Cease! [*Loki ceases.*] Wolf, what of thine oath?

FENRIS

Oathless am I.

BALDUR

Fenris, be tamed!

FENRIS

I — I — I am Allfather!

ODIN

Sublime inanity! heroic ape!
 This strong defiance were itself divine,
 And thou a titan-martyr, had thy pride
 One rational aim commensurate with thy woe.
 But all thy suffering is purposeless.
 Strike, Thor! Make of his obdurate heart thine
 anvil.

THE PACK

[*Some fawning toward Odin, others seeking protection of Fenris.*]

Heil, Othinn! Ulfr, heil!

[*As Fenris, by a gesture of rage, drives these from him into the cavern, Thor raises his hammer. Immediate night shuts out the scene. In this surge of darkness the deep rolling of thunder swells and culminates, as by waves, in the blank burst of the thunder-bolt. Through a half-lull, amid moaning of the Pack, are heard voices from the crater.*]

BALDUR'S VOICE

She leaps. Hold, Thor! She casteth herself down.

FREYJA'S VOICE

Beat on my heart, for mine containeth his.

ODIN

Light! light once more!

[*The thunder dies away. Sudden dawn breaks, ripening soon to daylight. Within the crater, Freyja is revealed, standing over the exhausted form of Fenris.*]

Freyja, what hast thou dared?

FREYJA

The bolt of iron and the scourge of brass
Avail not, Odin. — Let me conquer him
For thee!

ODIN

How wouldst thou tame him?

FREYJA

By my love,
Yea, and the exceeding might of Baldur's love,
Whose gracious arts of poesie shall aid me.
Grant him to us!

BALDUR

Grant him to us, O father !

ODIN

[*Going apart.*]

O thou unknown Destroyer and Deliverer,
Rape not again from me this nestling hope !

[*He descends into the crater.*]

BALDUR AND FREYJA

Grant him to us, Allfather, to be tamed !

FENRIS

[*Clutching the snow at their feet, feebly.*]

I — I am Allfather !

ODIN

Lovers, I grant him to you ; but not here,
For this concession must be darkly hid
Till you have proved its beauteous consummation.
Not, therefore, here I grant, but yonder.

[*Indicates the earth below them.*]

There

You shall enact a vast experiment,
Whereof the pregnant sequel none may know
Save only him, the master magian,
Whose prentices we gods and titans are,
And the blind wills of men his medium.
For he, with silent face from us averted,
Holds in the awful hollow of his hand
The world — his crucible, and plies with them

Ordeals of anguish and of ecstasy.
Therefore the earth must be your place of passion,
And there in slumber, even as mortals dream,
Slumb'ring, that they are bright immortal gods,
You shall be mortals, and shall walk as men,
Forgetful of your immortality.

*[Faintly, as from a great distance, there rises a sound of
many voices crying, "Odin! Asa Odin!" and the
rumour of beasts in pain.]*

Hark, now! from far below us, the deep moan
And lowing of a mortal sacrifice.
Speak, Thor! What seest thou at Odin's altar?

THOR

A mighty hunter and a twisted dwarf
Make sacrifice; rivals they seem, in feud,
And claim the hand of Thordis, thy priest's daughter,
And the priest cries on Odin for a portent
To choose which of the brothers shall be bridegroom.

ODIN

Lo, then, my portent! We ourselves, we four,
Shall be those rival brothers, priest and bride;
Loki and Thor shall ravish them with death
That we, in resurrection, may take on
Their bodies as our mortal vestiture.
For I will act with you this mystery,
Dreaming myself the priest of mine own shrine;
And Freyja, child, thy goddess heart shall beat
Within the heart of Thordis, mortal maid;
Thy boundless spirit, Baldur, shall be pinched

Within the gnarled limbs of the stunted dwarf,
 Twisted with pain, as now thy brother is;
 Thou, envious wolf, jealous of Baldur's joys!
 Thy feverish being shall invest the power
 And glorious stature of the hunter. So
 Shalt thou have scope and license measureless
 To woo the heart of Freyja. So shall ye,
 Lovers, make proof of your conjoined love
 And trothèd meekness, whether these be strong
 To tame this wolf, and from his blinding lusts
 Evolve a nobler consciousness, or weak
 To let themselves be blasted, and the world
 Itself eclipsed in universal chaos.

FREYJA

If we be strong?

ODIN

The wolf-god shall be tamed.

FENRIS

[In rage, half rising.]

Oathless am I unto Odin ever!

[He sinks back, faint.]

BALDUR

[To Odin.]

And tamed?

ODIN

He shall go free.

FREYJA

Even in such freedom

As ours?

ODIN

O Freyja, larger liberty —
The mightier peace which mortals only know —
Even death.

FENRIS

Freedom! Anarch — anarch! Freedom!

LOKI

Hail, Odin; smoketh thine altar afar.
Burneth to thee the cloven bullock's heart;
The sacrificers watch and wait thy sign.

ODIN

Let them behold it! Thou and Thor, stretch out
Your wings in storm, and ravish up their souls
With night and death.

[*To Baldur and Freyja.*]

Come, you my children! Now
Shall our immortal fires be mixed with clay
In the great crucible, and these our spirits
No more shall know themselves for gods, until
The shadowy Master shows the great solution.

[*In faint lightning and thunder, Loki and Thor disappear. Odin ascends the crater, followed by Baldur and Freyja. Climbing together the steep slope, these two look backward upon the prostrate wolf who, following them with his eyes, moves not until they reach the summit. There, against a sky of sunlit storm, Freyja pauses and stretches forth her arm to him.*]

FREYJA

Dear wolf !

FENRIS

[Starts up madly.]

Freyja ! death — freedom ! freedom ! death ! — Now
— now !

*[As Freyja and the gods pass from sight beyond the cliffs,
Fenris gnaws at his chain in inarticulate fury.]*

ACT FIRST

ACT I

SCENE I: Outside a tribal temple.

The gable beams are low ; only the entrance end of the building, set at an angle, on the left, is visible. In the distance rises a snow-capped volcano, its slopes—in the nearer background—pied with the young leaves and blossoms of early spring ; against these, jutting from behind the temple, a gallows-tree. On the right, at back, a solitary pine of great age sways solemn boughs over half the scene, the centre of which is occupied by a vast monolith, or boulder, tapering upward to a jagged end. The face of this stone, graved deeply with runes, is (on its lower half) dark carmine and smooth as ivory ; from behind it blue smoke is rising ; before it stands an altar of stone, on which is set a silver bowl.

In front of this altar stands INGIMUND, the temple priest, clad in a sleeveless leathern smock to the knees ; his arms are reddened with sacrifice ; from his throat—beneath his long, grey hair—hangs an image of Odin ; on his right wrist a ring of plain gold ; in his left hand a spear. On either side of him an altar priest holds a bunch of sprinkling twigs. From the temple four other priests are bearing a slaughtered bullock to the fire behind the rune-stone. Massed in the right foreground are EGIL and his men ; on the left, ARFI and his men. Egil, noble of stature, stands moodily filing the grooves of a cross-bow ; Arfi, bent and dwarfed, sits with his ear close to a harp, which he thrums softly.

From the right background, beneath the pine, enters, singing, a procession of the folk, escorting an ark on wheels, drawn by oxen, whose flanks are wreathed with flowers, and whose horns are adorned with gold. Following the ark, which passes on into the temple, horses and sheep are led to the sacrifice. These, as they pass before him, Ingimund marks with the sign of a spear, while the altar priests sprinkle them with blood from the silver bowl.

At the entrance of the temple stand THORDIS and her VIRGINS, who take from the beasts their garlands and hang them on the doors and outer walls. The men and women of the throng, chanting to a barbaric cadence, lift up their arms and faces to the sky.

THE FOLK

Wanderer of earth and air,
Walker on the giant flood,
Odin! Asa Odin!
Pilgrim of the storm!

Lyer in the Sybil's lair,
Reader of the runes of blood,
Thou who hearkenest all prayer —
World-spirit and worm,
Odin! Asa Odin!
Hear us, Allfather!

[*Distant thunder.*]

FRIDA

Thordis, he hears.

THE VIRGINS

He hears!

THE FOLK

He hears !

YORUL

[*To Rolf.*]

Behold

The dwarf, where he sits shrivelled by his harp.
Ho, Arfi ! hear'st thou Odin ? Hast invited
The trolls, thy cousins, to the bridal ?

WULDOR

Silence !

He listens to the stars behind the storm. .

YORUL

The tree-frogs, Wuldor. He, thy master, is
Their father.

WULDOR

So thy master is their uncle.

YORUL

My master shall be bridegroom, never fear !
Hath Arfi slain his boar ?

WULDOR

Hath Egil sung

The slaying of his boar ?

YORUL

Hath Arfi leashed

The wild stag by the horns and led him home ?

WULDOR

Hath Egil read the runes on Odin's stone ?

YORUL

Weaklings and women ye!

WULDOR

Thou liest, Yorul.

YORUL

[*Strikes Wuldor.*]

Ho, Egil, here!

WULDOR

[*Retaliating.*]

Ho, Arfi!

[*The followers, from either side, spring forward and fight fiercely. Ingimund strikes among them with his spear.*]

INGIMUND

Fools of anger!

This ground is Odin's; he alone may judge
Which of your masters shall betroth his priestess.
Back! and await his sign. — Come, Thordis.

FRIDA

[*Parting with Thordis by the temple.*]

Joy

And love be thine, dear lady.

[*Leaving her maidens, Thordis comes quietly from the temple and stands before the rune-stone and Ingimund, who, with his spear, beckons also Egil and Arfi. As these join Thordis, the altar priests, with a heavy chain of gold, enclose the four in a circular space, while the folk chant as before.*]

THE FOLK

Save us, Lord, from lovers' hate,
Shelter us from brothers' feud !

Odin ! Asa Odin !

Only thou art wise.

Choose unto this maid a mate
Hallowed by thy sanctitude,
Send thine omen while we wait,

Making sacrifice.

Odin ! Asa Odin !

Save us, Allfather !

[Thunder ; storm gathers and the scene grows darker, as bigger clouds of smoke roll upward from behind the rune-stone.]

INGIMUND

[Removing the gold circlet from his wrist.]

Here,

Your right hands here — all three — on Odin's ring.

[To Egil, then Arfi.]

Press deeper in the sand thy foot, now thine.

[To the Priests.]

Fill up the footprints with the sacred blood.
Brother in brother's footstep, hark your oath —
Your oath to abide by Asa Odin's will.

[As Egil and Arfi grasp the ring, lightning begins to play over the scene, and thunder deepens the voices of the people.]

THE FOLK

Odin! Odin! Asa Odin!
Send upon thy folk a portent!

INGIMUND

[Lifting his face and spear toward the sky, intones.]

By thy runes forever writ
On Allwaker's ear and Allswift's hoof,
On Sleipni's teeth and the sledge-bands,
On the Wolf's claw and the eagle's beak,
On the bloody wings and the bridge's end! —

THE FOLK

Odin! Odin! Asa Odin!
Send upon thy folk a portent!

INGIMUND

By thy runes forever writ
On Brage's tongue and the bear's paw,
On the midwife's palm and the amber god,
On Norna's nail and the owl's neb,
On wine and wort and the Sibyl's seat! —

THE FOLK

Odin! Odin! Asa Odin!
Send thy portent, O Allfather!

FRIDA

Look! look! himself doth come.

THE FOLK

Fly! fly! Oh, fly!

FRIDA

Himself doth come, and with him all the gods!

[Amid supernatural darkness and thunder-peal, Ingimund, Thordis, Egil, and Arfi are struck to the earth, and all the people flee, except Yorul and Frida, who crouch beside the temple.]

THE FOLK

[In the distance.]

Bow down! bow down!

[Pause; the passing of the storm; silence.]

FRIDA

[Rising.]

Yorul! — You do not speak.

Yorul!

YORUL

O Frida, hush!

FRIDA

And did you see them?

Four were they all together, and they passed
Like fire, and four returned, in robes of flame,
But paler.

YORUL

May be so; I saw them not.

FRIDA

Two others stood on Odin's stone, and one
Laughed loud, and whirled a whip of blazing brass,
And one thrust through his beard a smoking hammer.

YORUL

May be; may be. What did you say? Speak not!

[*Embracing her.*]

O heart of mine, thou beatest yet. We live.
The sun — how still it is! What's that?

FRIDA

A bird

Singing under the temple's eaves.

YORUL

And all

Are fled. What be those four that lie so still?

[*Together they approach the bodies.*]

FRIDA

Alas! O lady dear!

YORUL

Dead! they are dead.

Egil, my master! Odin's voice hath slain him.
Cursed be Odin!

FRIDA

Yorul — take them back,
Those words! Their sacrilege shall work us woe.

YORUL

What matter? He is dead.

FRIDA

Oh, do not think it!

Perhaps they sleep. Look how their brows still wear
High thoughts. I think they dream. Go! fetch a
leech.

YORUL
A leech for death?

FRIDA
Go quickly, Yorul!

YORUL
Well!
[*Going out.*]

A leech here for the dead! A leech, ho!
[*Exit.*]

FRIDA
[*Alone with the four bodies, stands before the rune-stone.*]

Odin!
Have pity on the dead; let them awake!
[*Slowly the bodies rise and look upon her; she crouches before them.*]

Ah me! Your eyes! They burn. O turn away
Your bright eternal eyes!
[*She falls unconscious. Egil, who has risen with the gold altar chain wound about him, gnaws it.*]

EGIL
Death! Freedom! freedom!
[*Enter Yorul and a LEECH, followed by the folk.*]

THE LEECH
Who calls for leechcraft here?

YORUL
[*Stands bewildered.*]

A miracle!

THORDIS

[*Bends over Frida.*]

The child is stricken.

ARFI

Let me lift her, Thordis.

YORUL

A miracle ! O Frida, speak to me !

THE LEECH

[*To the folk.*]

Stand off ! Give air !

WULDOR

[*To the folk.*]

Hath Yorul then deceived us ?

ROLF

Behold, they live !

FRIDA

[*Rising, faintly.*]

Thanks ; lead me to the temple.

INGIMUND

What hath befallen ?

WULDOR

Hail, Ingimund ! The portent
Of Odin hath befallen.

INGIMUND

Saw ye, or what?

[Wuldor and the folk whisper among themselves. Yorul supports Frida toward the temple.]

YORUL

But how? What chanced?

FRIDA

Their eyes! their burning eyes!
Oh, I have seen their souls: they are not theirs.
Four bright ones came, four pale ones went away.

YORUL

Clean reft of wit!

FRIDA

Oh, shut me in the dark!

[Taking Frida from Yorul, the temple virgins lead her into the temple.]

INGIMUND

[To Wuldor.]

Saw ye, I say, or what?

WULDOR

Ask Yorul, father.

INGIMUND

Speak thou! What hath befallen?

YORUL

[Returning dazed from the temple.]

Odin is wise ;

Ye that were dead are risen from the dead,
 And Frida, my betrothed, is reft of reason. —
 She said it would be, for I cursed him. — Egil !
 Master and lord, welcome to life !

[Egil, who, with fixed gaze, has been eyeing Thordis, starts wildly, paces back and forth, dragging the altar chain as he moves.]

EGIL

A verdict !

A verdict, priest and earls ! Thordis is mine.

EGIL'S MEN

Thordis for Egil !

ARFI'S MEN

Thordis for Arfi !

INGIMUND

Peace !

Heaven's omen still is dark, and Odin's sign
 Ambiguous. Not one, but four of us,
 His hand hath stricken. Wherefore thus I read
 His riddle : Thordis shall herself decide.

THORDIS

Father, not I !

INGIMUND

This ancient feud must end.
 These two have sworn to abide by Odin's will ;

His will it is that thou make choice of them.
Hearken their pleas, and choose.

THORDIS

To one must I

Give pain?

INGIMUND

To one give joy. Speak, Arfi.

ARFI

Lady,

That those who love are blind I pray be so
That, loving, so you may behold me not —
What thing I seem, but only hear my voice —
What truth I am. Thordis, even now I dreamed
A dream more high and awful than the clouds
And breathless peaks afire of poesie :
We stood together on the morning's brink ;
Crater and frozen cliff and snowy scar
Hung, avalanche on avalanche, below,
Below them still, — the world ! You spoke to me ;
Sweeter than measures of imagined song
Before the harp is struck, your voice ! " Listen !"
 you said ;
And echoing from scar and crater rose
The clanging of a chain. You clung to me ;
You clung to me and spoke not. — I have done.

INGIMUND

Egil !

[*Springing forward, Egil seizes Thordis's hand, which he raises to his lips.*]

EGIL

I love — I love thee !

*[He bites her hand. Screaming, she draws away from him
and clings to the dwarf.]*

THORDIS

Arfi !

ARFI

[Facing Egil.]

Brother !

WULDOR

Blood ! He hath bit her hand. Ho, sacrilege !

EGIL

The maid is mine.

ARFI

The maid is Odin's.

ROLF

[Seizing Yorul's arm, points at Egil.]

See !

His eyes grow small and blaze !

YORUL

He is possessed ;

Some god afflicts him.

[With a gesture of fury, Egil rushes upon Arfi.]

EGIL

Mine !

INGIMUND

[*Stays him.*]

The maid is Arfi's,
For she herself hath chosen him.

ARFI

[*Quietly.*]

A clout,
To stanch the blood.

WULDOR

[*As Arfi binds her hand, gazes on Thordis, whose eyes have closed.*]

O fair beyond this world!

EGIL

[*Clutching the air, in passion for coherence.*]

A rape! a rape! Thordis for Egil!

YORUL

[*Drawing.*]

Thordis
For Egil, here!

ARFI'S MEN

Thordis for Arfi!

EGIL'S MEN

Egil!

INGIMUND

Beware! Put back your weapons all, on pain
Of Odin's wrath.

THE FOLK

[*Murmur.*]

Remember Odin's wrath.

EGIL

Egil recks not for Odin's wrath nor will.
Who fights for Thordis?

INGIMUND

This is blasphemy.

EGIL

Who fights with Egil for the maiden?

YORUL

I,

And all of us.

EGIL'S MEN

Till death.

INGIMUND

Enough, mine earls!

The patience of the lord of peace hath end.

Egil, thy words and deed have violated

The sacred place of Odin. Thou art banned!

The lord hath put thee from his high place. Go!

I cast thee forth, and all who follow thee.

THE FOLK

[*Falling back.*]

Accurst! accurst!

EGIL

[Stands alone in a great circle.]

Behold they cast him forth!

Egil is banned! Who fights with Egil now?

YORUL

I, master!

ONE OF EGIL'S MEN

Fly! he is accurst.

[The men hesitate; then all—except twelve, including Yorul, who step into the circle—depart fearfully.]

THE TWELVE

Hail, Egil!

[The folk cry out; some go from the scene, others into the temple.]

EGIL

[Seizing up with both hands the silver bowl.]

Hail, liegemen! Twelve and one, we are enough
To vow ourselves to vengeance 'gainst the world.
A pledge, here! Ho, a pledge to groom and bride!
Drink pledge with me, in Odin's altar blood.
Thordis and vengeance! Hail!

THE TWELVE

Thordis and vengeance!

[Egil drinks from the silver bowl.]

SCENE II: The interior of Egil's lodge in the forest; toward twilight.

The room is roughly built of logs, long cross-beams overhead. From these (in the right corner, back) hang suspended the bodies and skins of antelope, bear, and wild game; and beneath these — piled upon a bench against the wall — a heap of furs and hides. Centre, back, a door. Left, in the earthen floor, a hearth with ashes; above it, a hole in the roof. Beyond this hearth, left, sitting at the open window, FRIDA, alone. She looks out dreamily toward the forest, from which horns echo and answer. Suddenly she starts up, gazes intently, gives a low cry, and, dodging down as she passes the window, springs across to the heap of hides, among which she conceals herself. After a pause, the door opens; EGIL enters, panting — evidently pursued. His brow is bleeding, and he limps. Turning to bar the door, he lets fall a bloodied wolf's skin. Immediately he snatches it up caressingly; gazes around, listens enraged to the horns, limps swiftly to the hearth, hesitates; then, as a sudden horn-blast resounds close by, falls on his knees, digs ferociously in the ashes with his two hands like an animal, thrusts the wolf's skin in the cavity, and covers it over with the ashes, carefully replacing the charred brands on top. Swiftly, then, binding up his bleeding brow and thigh, he unbars the door, seizes a whip from a corner, and springs stealthily out of the window. At the same moment, horses are heard to gallop up to the lodge; the door bursts open; YORUL and ROLF appear on the sill.

YORUL

He came this way. Look here, Rolf, in the sand —
And here : are not these paw-prints ?

ROLF

May be so.

I saw him last back yonder in the forest.

YORUL

I saw him slinking hither across the open.
Look, here again ; here's blood.

ROLF

What ! was he wounded ?

YORUL

Did not you see ?

ROLF

You know I did not ; tell me.

YORUL

Twice ; once across the eye, once in the shank.
'Twas Ingimund struck both wounds.

ROLF

Ingimund !

YORUL

Yes, when we left you, Egil rode ahead,
I and the others after. We had ridden
A half-mile, when I heard our master shout :
“ Here comes our brother with his bride ahunting.”
And sure, there burst into our narrow glen
Horse, hound, and horn, the whole bright cavalcade ;

And Thordis rode ahead, and Arfi next,
Last, Ingimund. We reined our horses back —

ROLF

Not to pollute the lady with the sight
Of your accursed faces, eh?

YORUL

Say rather
To keep our scanty numbers hid.

ROLF

Well — well?

YORUL

Well, I had hardly reined back in the wood
And Thordis passed me by — Man, it was awful!
Under the very hoofs of the dwarf's horse —
Out of the earth, it seemed — there sprang a wolf
And bit the stallion's loin. The horse rolled over —
A wolf — a giant wolf!

ROLF

What then?

YORUL

I say

It stood as high as that, Rolf, yet I swear
If it were not a wolf, yet what —

ROLF

What happened?

YORUL

There rang a great shout and the riders all
Leapt to the ground where, in the midst of them,

Tangled together with the kicking steed,
Rolled the huge wolf and Arfi; him the beast
Held by the gorge between his grinning jaws,
Throttling him like a whelp. But Ingimund —

ROLF

Hel have him! Did he save the dwarf?

YORUL

He dragged
The wolf away, and struck him with his spear
Twice, as I told you. But the beast escaped.

ROLF

And Arfi lives?

YORUL

I know not. I made after
The wolf, and met you as I tracked him here.

ROLF

But what said Egil?

YORUL

I was too amazed
To look for him.

ROLF

There winds his horn in the wood,
And yonder he comes riding with the others.
Come; we'll go meet them.

[*Exit.*]

[*As Yorul is following Rolf, Frida steps forward.*]

FRIDA

[*Speaks low.*]

Yorul!

YORUL

Her voice! Frida! Frida!

FRIDA

Keep me!

YORUL

Stand farther off. O girl, what brings you here?
How found you out this solitary place?

FRIDA

I left my mistress' side at dawn, and searched
All day the forest.

YORUL

Little Frida, thou!

FRIDA

Come with me!

YORUL

Stand away! You have forgot
I am accurst. This place is Egil's lodge,
And all who dwell here banned and castaway.

FRIDA

Where you are must I fear to be?

YORUL

Yes, Frida,
For Ingimund has cursed me with my master.

FRIDA

Leave him.

YORUL

Whom?

FRIDA

Leave him, Yorul.

YORUL

Leave whom, child?

FRIDA

Egil, your master.

YORUL

[*In amazement.*]

Frida!

FRIDA

Hush!

[*She goes to the hearth.*]

YORUL

[*In scorn.*]

Desert

My lord! His liegeman, I a traitor!

FRIDA

Look.

[*She brushes back the ashes, revealing the beast's head.*]

YORUL

The wolf! By heaven, dead! What — *you* killed
him

FRIDA

No.

YORUL

And flayed, the very brute! Here are the marks
Of Ingimund, his spear. Saw you the beast
Alive?

FRIDA

Yes.

YORUL

Here?

FRIDA

I watched it limping here,
Wounded, from out the forest.

YORUL

Ha! I said so.

Here to the very door-sill?

FRIDA

Yes; it pushed

The door ajar.

YORUL

But —

FRIDA

Egil entered.

YORUL

Egil!

FRIDA

His brow was bleeding and he limped. He buried
That thing beneath the ashes, and sprang forth
Out at the window.

YORUL

Buried this?

FRIDA

As dogs

Bury their secrets, claw and nozzle. — Yorul!

YORUL
You *saw* ?

FRIDA
I saw. O Yorul, 'tis a werewolf.

YORUL
[*Drops the hide and steps back.*]

Ah ! do not name it !
FRIDA
Leave him. Come away !

YORUL
Bleeding — his brow, you said ?
FRIDA
Yes; come away !

YORUL
So be it.
FRIDA

Gracious Odin ! he will come.

YORUL
Since that wild day he bit your mistress' hand
It hath misgiven me the gods torment him.
Once, for seven days, ceaseless he paced this hall,
Spoke not, nor ate, but ground and ground his teeth ;
And in the night, once, when I watched him sleeping,
His eyelids lay rolled back and filled with fire.

FRIDA
That day the storm burst over Odin's stone
And I beheld those mighty four in flame —

Oh, since then, Yorul, they have changed, my mistress

Even as your master, save that she has grown
Lovelier than herself, and seems to bear
About with her the loadstone of desire,
For the poor hinds and churls that wait upon her
Serve her with souls enamoured. If I thought
You would believe my vision, I could tell —
But come, Yorul. Yorul! you will not come?

YORUL

Never! Stop, Frida; do not name the thing
He is. It matters not to me; for me
He is my lord, my master; that is all.

FRIDA

But if —

YORUL

If he were that eternal beast
Whom Odin chains until the dawn of doom,
Fenris, the wolf —

FRIDA

No, say not that!

YORUL

I say

Still it should matter not; I am his liegeman,
His vassal, and his bonds slave. I will serve him.

[*Enter, with his followers, Egil, cracking his whip.*]

EGIL

The wolf! Where is your wolf?

ROLF

We tracked him here.

EGIL

Lies! lies! He lurks yet in the forest.

ERIC

[Pointing at Yorul, who holds up the skin.]

Look!

THE MEN

The wolf!

EGIL

[Leaping upon Yorul, flings him to the ground.]

Traitor!

YORUL

Hold, master —

FRIDA

[Coming forward.]

Save him!

ROLF

Thou!

Thou, maiden, here?

FRIDA

Oh, help him!

ERIC

[With the others' help, separates the two.]

Egil! off!

EGIL

A ferret, ho! a ferret, earls; hath scent
And sight and hearing — what, for rats? No, no,
For wolves!

ROLF

[*Aside to Eric.*]

The madness!

YORUL

Master, 'tis the wolf.

I killed him.

EGIL

Killed him? Thou?

[*Craftily.*]

What wolf?

YORUL

The beast

That bit the dwarf.

EGIL

Dead; so 'tis dead. Let see!

[*Taking the pelt from Yorul, he drops it on the hearth.*]It should, methinks, be buried too. *Thy* kill?

YORUL

Mine, Egil.

EGIL

[*With his foot, covering the pelt with the ashes.*]Killed and flayed. Huzza, mine earls,
For Yorul and his kill.

THE MEN

[*Gather round Yorul.*]

Huzza!

EGIL

'Tis buried.

[*Aside.*]

He knows, he knows ; I will avenge me.

[*Looks keenly at Rolf.*]

Well,

What art thou gazing on ?

ROLF

On nothing.

EGIL

Liest,

Liest ; art gazing on my brow. What, what ?

'Tis bandaged, ah ! What then ? What then, I say ?

ERIC

Why, he is wounded.

EGIL

Traitors ! traitors all !

Aha, by Loki, but you lie. I fell —

You lie ! My horse was diked. I fell and gashed me,

My brow, my thigh. Why not my brow and thigh ?

May not a huntsman fall from 's saddle ? Liars !

I limp, but not for that. I *will* limp ![*Suddenly changing.*]

Hark !

[*He springs to the window.*]

YORUL

What dost thou hear ?

EGIL

They smell the blood. They come
To dig it up. Their nozzles scour the gorse.
Yorul! Yorul!

YORUL

[To whom Egil clings.]

'Tis nothing.

EGIL

They have found
The scent. You cannot make them lose it, Yorul.
You loop and loop for miles, plunge in the lake,
Swim over, double through the thickets, spring
All-feet from rock to rock in the ravine,
Crouch in the fern and listen: still you hear them
Belling behind you, all their big chests panting,
Their red tongues lolled, the great hot breathing,—
bloodhounds!
Bloodhounds!

ROLF

[At the window.]

By Odin, see, yonder the dogs
Of Ingimund; he hath them in the leash;
Behind him, on a litter, they are bringing
Arfi, the dwarf.

EGIL

Yorul! Keep back the hounds!
Mercy! Thou art no kin of theirs. They have
No feud of blood with thee. Keep back the hounds!
Mercy!

ERIC

[*Aside to men.*]

Still madder !

ROLF

They are twoscore men,
And we a handful ; shall we fight ?

EGIL

Fight, madmen ?
Have ye not heard the hounds ? Keep back the
hounds.
Go forth and bind their leashes to the trees.
Bind them, and guard them, every slave of you !
Go ! Go !

ROLF

What ! fear their dogs ?

ERIC

Yorul, his eyes —
They burn !

YORUL

Be patient, master !

EGIL

Treachery !
You've lured 'em on. They come to dig it out ;
They smell the wounds. Ye have betrayed me.

YORUL

Men,
Come forth and let us bind the hounds.

EGIL

[*Swinging his whip.*]

Slaves! cowards!
Traitors! the lash shall teach you.

[*Striking Rolf.*]

Bind the hounds!

ROLF

This goes too far.

YORUL

[*Imploring.*]

Come!

EGIL

Mercy! Ah! their fangs!
Their fangs! Devils, go forth and bind the hounds.

[*Follows the men, lashing them.*]

ERIC

By Loki!

YORUL

[*Aside.*]

Humour him.

[*The men go forth, whipped wildly by EGIL, who sinks
exhausted by the closed door.*]

EGIL

Keep back the hounds —
Their fangs!

YORUL

[*Outside.*]

Fear nothing; we will bind them.

FRIDA

[Starts for the door.]

Yorul!

[EGIL, rolling in her way, gazes at her, and rises, panting;
she draws back.]

EGIL

Thou art the maid of Yorul.

FRIDA

I am his.

EGIL

Who hid the wolf — he knows.

FRIDA

He knows.

EGIL

His maiden!

Shalt make a fair revenge.

FRIDA

Ah! Save me, Yorul!

[She faints.]

EGIL

Yorul, a dear revenge!

[Lifting her in his arms, he bears her off, left.]

A lair! a lair!

[A pause; sunset glows through the window; the outer door
is partly opened by Rolf, who calls in.]

ROLF

O Egil ! Ingimund demands to enter
And rest here for the night. Thy brother's wound
Grows worse ; they doubt his life. Shall we resist
 them,
Or welcome ? They are armed. — Egil ! — Not here ?

*[Exit, closing the door. Another pause ; the room grows
dimmer ; Egil slowly reënters, left.]*

EGIL

Now will I sleep. — The time is strangely sweet,
Blank, and untroubled. Soon it will be starlight.
My limbs are filled with peace, mine ears with sounds
Of brooks and breezy leafage murmurous,
Mine eyes with slumber. Well, I will lie down
And sleep.

*[As Egil goes to the hearth, enter INGIMUND, THORDIS,
WULDOR, and a number of Arfi's men, carrying a litter,
on which lies ARFI ; these accompanied by Yorul, Rolf,
Eric, and Egil's men.]*

INGIMUND

Slow ; bear him softly, Wuldor. Let
The others stay without, and place our men
Most carefully on guard. For this one night,
Yorul, thy master's bann shall be suspended.
The need is great.

THORDIS

[By the litter.]

Father, he hath grown paler.

INGIMUND

Here set him down.

EGIL

[*Gazing at Thordis.*]

Dreaming!

THORDIS

Gently! his side.

WULDOR

Lady, what more to do?

ARFI'S MEN

[*Some kneel, some kiss her robe; all give to her their eyes
and hearts unconsciously.*]

What more?

THORDIS

Bring water.

YORUL

[*Aside.*]

Master, the hounds are tethered. Where is Frida?

EGIL

Dreaming! still dreaming!

YORUL

Frida?

EGIL

Wake me not.

THORDIS

Arfi! O gentle earl, look up! Let not
Your ears be as the turf to our great sorrow.
Arfi! I love you; live!

YORUL

[*To Rolf.*]

Hast thou seen Frida ?

ROLF

No.

[*Exit Yorul, left; Egil approaches Arfi's litter.*]

EGIL

Will he die ?

INGIMUND

The virus of the wolf
Corrupts his blood; yet he may live.

EGIL

May live.

WULDOR

O God! I could take heart to bear this woe
But that the damnèd beast that bit my master
Still breathes.

INGIMUND

I wounded him.

WULDOR

Yet he escaped us.

ROLF

You, Wuldor, but not us. The wolf is dead;
Behold his skin !

[*Reënter Yorul. He staggers forward.*]

INGIMUND

Who killed him ?

ERIC

Egil's man

Yorul.

INGIMUND

Hail, Yorul ! This deed shall atone
For much of thy defiance and thy master's.
Well done !

YORUL

[*Wildly.*]

A lie ! a lie ! the wolf still lives.

ALL

Lives ?

YORUL

There !

EGIL

[*Crouching back.*]

Ai ! anarch !

YORUL

[*Grappling Egil, tears off his bandages.*]

Look ! Look, Ingimund !
The wounds : you struck them with your hunting-
spear.

INGIMUND

Forehead and thigh !

YORUL

He sprang on Arfi's horse,
And bit his brother's throat — his murderer.
There lies his changeling skin. He buried it
Here in the ashes.

THE MEN

[*Falling away.*]

Werewolf ! Werewolf !

INGIMUND

Thou art accused of sin unnameable. Earl,
Speak : art thou guilty ?

EGIL

[*Glares about him in fear and rage.*]

Ai ! Ai ! anarch !

INGIMUND

Demon !

YORUL

Ah, Frida ! Master — Frida !

ROLF

What of her ?
Not dead ?

YORUL

No, no ; would God she were, and I !
Frida !

[*Exit, left.*]

INGIMUND

Destroy the wolf.

THORDIS

[*To Wuldor, who is about to attack Egil with a spear.*]

Stop, earl! Your master;
He has heard all.

ARFI

[*Raises his body painfully on the litter.*]

My brother — Egil — spare him.

WULDOR

But 'tis a werewolf!

INGIMUND

He has sought your life.

ARFI

The life he sought to take I give to him.
My strength is little; if you love me, spare him.

WULDOR

'Tis madness!

THORDIS

Nay, 'tis mercy, but to you
Reason is vengeance. Father, look; he sinks
Again. Will you deny the prayer of him —

[*Lowering her voice.*]

Perchance who dies.

ARFI

[*Faintly.*]

Egil!

INGIMUND

Egil shall live ;
So much I grant thee, Arfi, but no more.
Henceforth thy brother shall be cast in chains,
Until the demon-beast that plagues his body
Is exorcised and tamed. — Lay on the chains.

[As the men approach with fetters, Egil seizes a chain from one, and, springing fearfully to Thordis's side, there crouches and lifts it to her.]

EGIL

Not those — but thou !

[Thordis puts the chain upon Egil.]

ACT SECOND

ACT II

SCENE I: A prison chamber, dim, built of stone

On the right stands a high, framed tapestry, the design partly worked; beside it, on a table, several harps and instruments of music. On the left, extending centre, the half-completed model of a structure resembling the temple in Act I, Scene I; beside it, wooden blocks and miniature beams; in front of it a stone tablet, upon which EGIL — stooped, with an instrument in his hand — is laboriously carving runes. Behind him stands ARFI, at times guiding the hand of his brother, who is evidently being overcome by weariness, against which he struggles for concentration. Finally Egil's head droops, his hand falls, and his body sinks prone. At the door, THORDIS enters.

THORDIS

Asleep?

ARFI

Quite, quite outworn.

THORDIS

The task is done?

The runes?

ARFI

He has mastered them.

THORDIS

[Sighs unconsciously.]

How swift he learns!

ARFI

Yes, hourly he hath grown through the strange
months

Since Ingimund entrusted him to us
To dispossess the beast that plagues him.

THORDIS

Look

Now where he lies and dreams.

ARFI

There lies a block

Of chaos, for our wills to fuse and kindle
Into a world, glowing with vital forms
Of law and loveliness. Yea, Thordis, we —
We are his being's seasons, you and I;
The sun and moon, the starshine and the dew,
Of this stark heath and breeding moor of passion,
And the large jurisdiction of our love
Must ripen there the temperate growths of reason,
And stablish the mind's palaces.

THORDIS

You speak

In sadness.

ARFI

Nay, in awe. The thought grows vast
And awful.

THORDIS

So? I do not feel it, I!

I feel as elemental as the air,
That holds secure within its crystal veins
As many thousand summers and their blooms
As the earth may yearn for.

ARFI

'Tis because you are
Bounteous as the air, that from your presence all
Take breath and power. Since you elected me
Beside the altar stone, even I, that was
A warped and ailing mannikin of woe,
Prickling with sensibilities and pangs,
Have felt myself exalted and at peace
With this poor twisted mask of torse and limb,
So simple it seems, so sane, so actual,
That what I am was your immortal friend
Elsewhere.

THORDIS

And have you felt the same? We two
Have walked eternal mountains hand in hand,
And watched the morning of our little lives
Break over our birth-hour, and we shall stand
Together at the sundown, and behold
The passion clouds of death grow pale.

ARFI

And then

We shall pass on together.

[*In his sleep, Egil moans.*]

THORDIS

We forget ;
We must not leave *him* as we found him, love.

ARFI

The wolf torments him still in sleep.

THORDIS

Poor dreamer !
And have you told him yet we are to wed
To-morrow ?

ARFI

No ; I dreaded to rouse up
The old, jealous hate ; for since my wound has healed,
He seems to have forgotten that old feud,
And looks on you and me no more, methinks,
As keepers of his prison-house, but rather
As his accomplices, that smuggle in
Subtle devices for his liberation,
To comprehend the use of which he expends
All of his time and powers.

THORDIS

Accomplices :
It may be so ; for he, that used to hang
With looks of fire upon my merest motion,
Will gaze beyond me now with eyes that gloat
Blank as a miser's on some buried hoard.

ARFI

The gold he hoards is knowledge, and 'tis well,
For that preoccupation may assuage

The pain he else might feel, when he shall learn
Our joy to-morrow.

[*Egil cries out again.*]

THORDIS

Yearning heart! how deep
It labours still in pain! Let us take care
To acquaint him gently with our happiness.
We must divert him. — Why, what's here?

ARFI

[*Smiling.*]

A temple;

We're architects.

THORDIS

He helped you build it?

ARFI

I

Am helping him.

THORDIS

But how shall this avail
To tame the wolf?

ARFI

His genius is destruction;
His breath and bondage — to annihilate;
And therefore Egil must be shown to build
And not destroy; of mean, chaotic things —
These blocks — to make admired harmony,
And shape, however rude, some tangible
Earnest of his constructive will.

THORDIS

I see ;

Who would have thought of it but you ? Not I !

[*Egil moans.*]

Hark !

EGIL

[*Low, in his sleep.*]

Freyja !

THORDIS

Did he call ?

EGIL

Freyja !

THORDIS

That name !

You heard ?

ARFI

The goddess Spring's.

THORDIS

You taught him, then,

To pray ?

ARFI

Not I.

EGIL

[*Starting to his feet.*]

Freyja !

THORDIS

Can this be Egil ?

EGIL

[Crouched, pacing to and fro.]

Free me, Freyja! Frore am I, frost-bit;
 Go we together into greenwood glad!
 Mirk under moon-mist mad will meet thee,
 Hunt thee from hiding, thy heart-beats hear.

ARFI

It is the wolf that wakes, while Egil slumbers.

EGIL

[Looking, with closed eyes, as toward a height.]

Free me, Freyja! Fair art thou, froward;
 Go we together into greenwood glad!
 Burns thine eyebeam bright as the bitch-wolf's;
 Longeth Fenris in thy lair to lie.

THORDIS

What other name spake he?

ARFI

I could not hear.

EGIL

[In sudden terror, seeking to fly.]

Ai! anarch! anarch! Ulfr!

THORDIS

Wake him.

ARFI

Wait;

What this reveals to us may prove of help
 To him.

EGIL

[*Defiantly.*]

Oathless am I !

THORDIS

But see ! he suffers.

EGIL

I — I am Allfather !

[Swaying with anguish, as under the blows of a scourge, he sinks upon the floor, overwhelmed and quivering.]

Oathless — am — I —

THORDIS

Egil, awake ! awake ! 'Tis nothing.

EGIL

[Gradually waking, rises to his knees.]

Freyja !

THORDIS

No goddess I, poor Egil, but your friend
Thordis, the maiden.

EGIL

She thou art — the same
Even now that saved me. [*Starting.*] What is that ?

ARFI

Your brother.

EGIL

My brother he is tall and beautiful,
Happy and glorious, and I hate him for't.

ARFI

Nay, you have hated me, but not for that.
Look on me, Egil.

EGIL

Arfi!

THORDIS

'Twas a dream.

EGIL

What's that — a dream? Is it a mist that steals
Between the eyelids, filling them with shap
Begot of its own vapour, — shadows? lies?
If so, which shapes are dreams — your forms, or those,
Those even now that beheld me, where I crouched
Among the crater's hoar crusts, numb with cold,
Yet writhing in the brassy flames, that eat
And crawled into my vitals? Mine? No, no!
That was not I, that nameless thing, not I!
Say "No."

ARFI

It was the wolf. You fell asleep,
Wearied, and dreamed of him.

EGIL

If that be sleep,
Then let me sleep no more. O friends, sweet friends,
You that have weaned and reared me from this thing,
Promise I nevermore may droop mine eyes
But you will prod them open.

THORDIS

You forget

How you have grown. Soon you will be once more —
But oh ! how milder, mightier, than before —
Egil, the hunter.

EGIL

Till then, Egil the hunted !

O Thordis, could I meet — as many a time
I've met within the forest, face to face,
My quarry, and destroyed it — could I so
Confront this inward beast and grapple him
To the death-struggle, — ha ! but with a dream !
A spectral wolf, that lurks ever in the dusk
And tangled thickets of my brain and will,
A wraith invulnerable, that makes his lair
In my bosom, that, when I would strike,
I lacerate myself, draw life — myself
The beast, the bait, the hunter and the hunted !

THORDIS

Nay, you are still the hunter, he the quarry,
Only to track him hath grown harder, for
He hath grown duskier as your mind hath dawned,
And can no more take shape, as he was wont,
In tangible horror to the eyes of all.
Yet we will track him — you and I.

EGIL

But how ?

THORDIS

With flaming torches we will set ablaze
His ancient wilderness, till through the gap

Of sundering boughs the quiet stars shall mock him,
Naked and overwhelmed.

EGIL

But where? What boughs?
What fire?

THORDIS

[Taking up, among the instruments, a reed-pipe.]

The way is wild; this pipe shall lead us.
Play, Arfi!

[Sitting beside the block temple, Arfi begins to play upon the reed.]

EGIL

But this pipe —

THORDIS

Do you not hear
Her voice alluring us? It is a wood-sprite,
The elf-child Harmony.

EGIL

Where can she lead us?
This is a prison.

THORDIS

She can lead us forth
Into the beauteous world. Hark! even now —
Do you not see? — the walls are crumbling, bright
With ivy-dew and morning. — Don't you hear?
The birds! the birds! — Now, Egil, now your hand!

Now on the dance with me! We'll follow her
On — to the chase!

[*Taking hands, they dance whilst Arfi blows the mellow pipe.
Eager, impetuous, Egil becomes kindled by the sound and
motion till, in the midst, dropping Thordis's hand, he
grotes toward the wall.*]

EGIL

The chase! the chase! the chase!
Ho, torches for the chase!

ARFI

[*Stops playing, and rises.*]

A metaphor

Transforms him.

EGIL

Torches!

[*Stumbling against the blocks.*]

What is this?

ARFI

Our temple;

We've left it uncompleted.

EGIL

This! — the chase!

To sit block-building like a little child?

To ask vague questions that await strange answers?

No! do not mock me! Summon the great hunt.

Hand me a torch into my gripping palm,

Point where to leap, and let the whirlwinds sing

And the great jungles crash in conflagration.
The wolf ! reveal the wolf ! that I may rend
The demon limb from limb.

ARFI

He rages blind
Now in your eyes.

EGIL

[*Controlling himself, shudders.*]

Emancipate me !

ARFI

Come ;
Here let us sit, as we were boys again,
And pile our blocks.

THORDIS

Go, Egil ! Build with him.
The forest-sprite has led you to her temple.

[*Going to the tapestry frame, while Egil joins Arfi, she begins to work upon the embroidery, observing from time to time their block-building.*]

EGIL

A temple ! Still they mock me. — 'Tis a toy.

ARFI

Why, true, a toy, and yet a temple, if
The mind bring incense here, and the bow'd heart
Make sacrifice.

EGIL

We are not pigmies, we,
To creep under this gable.

ARFI

Are we not?

Are we so great? Who hath not stood beneath
A sparrow's egg-shell, speckled o'er with stars,
And dwindled there with wonder? Who so small
But hath, to quench desire, drunk of the sun
Or set his parch'd lips to the moon's pale rim?
So great, so small, neither and both, our stature
Waxes and wanes, inconstant as a shadow
'Twixt night and noon and night. This temple, lad,
Will be as cramped or spacious as the spirit
Which consecrates it.

EGIL

Dark! Thou speakest darkness.

ARFI

Listen! This house of toy-wood is the altar
Where you must supplicate the immortal gods
For freedom.

EGIL

So; the immortal gods! What, then,
Are they that I should sue to them for freedom?

ARFI

They are the powers of the inevitable
To whom we mortals must submit our wills
Or perish.

[*Egil's structure falls.*]

EGIL

Ah! it breaks. What made it fall?

ARFI

A god: the same that holds these prison walls
Stone upon stone; the same that mortises
The rock-seams of the solid hills, and hangs
Aloft the glittering roof-tree of the world. —
You builded weak, and the god chided you.

EGIL

Are then the gods so near?

ARFI

In all our acts
We feel the might of their invisible hands,
But only in prayer behold them face to face.

EGIL

In prayer?

ARFI

The abnegation of our wills
For theirs, the affirmation of their laws,
Which to the god's "Thou must" answers "I will."

EGIL

And that is freedom?

ARFI

That alone is freedom.

EGIL

I will be free then, Arfi. Why, 'tis simpler
Than playing with these blocks. I will be free!
Teach me to pray.

ARFI

I cannot.

EGIL

Teach me, Thordis.

[She shakes her head and smiles.]

Alas! who will?

ARFI

Yourself alone.

EGIL

But how?

How may I know when I have learned to pray?

ARFI

When, in the full sight of your goal of yearning,
Your spirit, pausing, cries out to the gods —
“ This is my heart’s desire — take it — ’tis yours ! ”
That instant of renunciation will
Be prayer and freedom both and the wolf’s passing-
bell.

[Enter WULDOR ; he goes to Arfi and speaks aside.]

Admit him.

WULDOR

But —

ARFI

Why not?

WULDOR

His looks are wild,
His words were bitter. When he spoke of thee,
He laughed and scowled.

ARFI

Say we will come to him.

[*Exit Wuldor.*]

THORDIS

[*Whom Arfi approaches, with a warning gesture.*]

Who is it?

ARFI

[*Aside.*]

Yorul ; he has asked to speak
With Egil.

THORDIS

Ought we to admit him?

ARFI

It is wise,

For so may Egil measure what he is
By what he was. Look ; he has knelt to pray.
The time is fitting ; we will leave him so.

THORDIS

[*Leaving the tapestry.*]

How noble he looks ! Shall we not tell him now
About to-morrow ?

ARFI

We will tell him all
When he has prayed.

[*Exeunt.*]

EGIL

[*Solus.*]

To pray — to pray is simple :
“ This is my heart’s desire — take it — ’tis yours ! ”
And so — emancipation. O you gods,
If through these prison walls you may behold
The mock rites of this childish temple, hear me !
Knowledge — knowledge, that is my heart’s desire.
That is the soul-inebriating cup
Which hath transformed me half unto your image
And still hath drugg’d the other brutish half
To lethargy and dreams. To know, to learn,
And evermore to learn ! To watch new worlds
Kindling from out the dark of consciousness,
Fresh firmaments gathering from drop to drop
Of common morning dew ; to be upborne
On the light-trailing wings of understanding
And scan far off the former crawling-place
And wolf-haunt of the spirit, to spread those wings
At one’s own will and mount into the sun,
Searing the mind with ecstasy — you gods !
That is my heart’s desire : take it from me !
Take it, ’tis yours, for it hath come from you,
But when of that you have bereft me, leave
Freedom instead, and innocence.

[*Enter YORUL.*]

What’s there ?

Speak.

YORUL

[As Egil starts up, bows himself at his feet.]

Thy betrayer.

EGIL

Oh, art thou a god?

And art thou come in answer to my prayer?

YORUL

Master—

EGIL

I know thy voice.

YORUL

[Turning upward his face.]

Destroy me.

EGIL

[Dreamily.]

Yorul!

Yorul, my liegeman!

YORUL

Once thou named me so;

Once and the world was sweet—once and 'twas
sweet.

EGIL

Why have they sent thee, Yorul?

YORUL

Who, my lord?

EGIL

Thou art their messenger ; be swift ; declare
Their grace, or doom. — Shall I go free ?

YORUL

Destroy me
With blows of steel, not of remorse. None sent me.
Myself hath driven me here, here to the cell
Wherein my treachery consigned my master.
Hear me !

EGIL

I hear thee, Yorul.

YORUL

Since that night,
That bitter sunset when she — since that night
Till now, I have not left the forest, nor
Spoken with friend or foe ; but I have stopped
My heart in the deep silentness of trees
Till it hath burst for pain. My wrong and thine,
Thy wrong and mine — I dared to balance them,
To let my woe condone my treachery
And prove it justified, as if my heart
Were not itself thy vassal, and its pangs
Feudal to thy desires. And so I sinned
Until to-day.

EGIL

These are enigmas. Speak !
How have the gods made answer to my prayer ?

YORUL

To-day I met with peasants in the wood
Who drove their herds of swine all garlanded
With green arbutus. Hailing me, they cried,
“Why come ye not with us to Odin’s stone
Against to-morrow’s wedding-day?” “Who weds?”
Quoth I. “Our priestess Thordis weds the dwarf;
Come with us!” Then I bit my arm and vowed
That I would come to thee and speak my shame,
And say, “Destroy me, lord, or let me serve thee.”

EGIL

Peasants they were; they said — what was’t they
said?

YORUL

“To-morrow our priestess Thordis” —

EGIL

“*Weds the dwarf!*”

Those were thy words; thou shalt not change them
now.

YORUL

I would not change them.

EGIL

Wouldst thou not? Well said!

“To-morrow the maiden Thordis” — nay, not so;
“To-morrow our priestess Thordis — *weds the dwarf.*”
And all their swine were garlanded. — Was it so?

YORUL

Even so, and I —

EGIL

Even so !

YORUL

I vowed to come —

EGIL

[*Laughing.*]

Knowledge — knowledge — that was my heart's
desire !

YORUL

And make confession —

EGIL

Why, here have I sat
And licked the crumbs of knowledge from his hand
As I had been his beagle ; and for what ?
To grow ! to be transmuted from a wolf
Into my brother's ape ! To evolve a mind
That knows at last the rapture it must lose.
Oh, noble !

YORUL

And make confession of my crime
As of my love.

EGIL

[*Beginning to pace back and forth.*]

Ha !

YORUL

For I loved her well,
More than I dreamed. Love leads us from the truth
And blinds us to ourselves.

EGIL

Ah !

YORUL

So when I
Beheld that deed — forgive me !

EGIL

Ah !

YORUL

I spake
Those traitor's words that damned thee to this cell ;
For I was mad. O God ! the memory
Maddens me now.

EGIL

Ha !

YORUL

Look not on me so,
For I am weak and passionate. Take care !
The truth deserts me ! — Nay, forgive me, master,
'Tis love is falsehood.

EGIL

Ah !

YORUL

I am thy liegeman,
And what was mine was thine to take, unquestioned.

EGIL

Ah !

YORUL

Yet my soul *would* question, and I claimed her
In spite of thee, for that same night—

[*Draws nearer and whispers.*]

I killed her.
Mine! She is mine! Thou canst not touch her
now.

She lies out yonder with the virgin stars
White and inviolable. Dead, she is mine
Whom, living, 'twas thy title not to spare.
Master, pity my triumph! Leave me yet
This foible of my arrogance, for which
Henceforth I am thy loyal slave, to do
Or die for thee.

EGIL

Wouldst serve me — ah?

YORUL

Say how!

EGIL

Seems thou canst kill.

YORUL

Speak but that word.

[They look long at each other.]

EGIL

'Tis spoken.

Go! — Stay!

YORUL

What more?

EGIL

Thine oath! — for sometimes, Yorul,
The resolute grow sick with afterthought,
And hot will cool — thine oath, to shun my sight,
To speak not nor be spoken with, until
'Tis done.

YORUL

[Raising his right arm.]

By Frida's cold and virgin hand,
To shun my master's sight, to speak not, nor
Be spoken with, until 'tis done.

EGIL

'Tis sworn;

Go now.

[Yorul covers his face, and exit.]

To-morrow she shall wed — not him.
O dupe of lovers! Bond-slave to a dwarf!
O gods, your fool! your fool!

[Throwing himself down beside the temple of blocks, he destroys it, insensate, and crouches, laughing, amid the ruins.]

SCENE II

[*The curtain rises presently upon the same: a taper burns low. THORDIS, seated with a harp, is playing; near her EGIL stands amid the black ruins. Ceasing to play, Thordis rises, looks at Egil (who stands oblivious), passes silently to the window and looks out.*

THORDIS

The moon has set.

EGIL

[*Stirs as from a trance.*]

Can, then, the eternal cease?

That perfect architecture pale in air?

You built again my temple of sweet sounds

And peopled it with deathless visitants,

And shed around their forms a nameless grace

Medicinal as moonlight, and as calm.

I walked with them, and they discoursed with me.

Almost it seemed myself was one of them. —

And then you ceased.

THORDIS

'Tis beauty's paradox

To prove itself immortal — and to die.

EGIL

Die? Must this godlike transmutation lapse

Into the lurking wolf again? Ah, no!

That music died in labour, and its yearning

Hath borne a man-child, that lives after it

Here in my soul. Henceforth I nevermore

May be that groping hypocrite of prayer
 Whom you uplifted from this ruined altar,
 With passion-sealèd eyes seeking the light
 Of freedom. No, henceforth I shall be strong,
 Clear-eyed, serene, and dauntless. See! I take
 Your hand and bid you go from me. — Thou only,
 Thou art my heart's desire. See! I renounce thee.
 Go from me, for I love you. Leave me! Yet
 You leave me not alone; that passionate presence
 Which the blind wrath and hunger for possession
 Cries out for from my clay — of that I am
 Bereft indeed; but losing that, I gain
 The stellar part of you, the exceeding light
 Of fellowship and human sympathy. —
 Leave me! I love you.

THORDIS

Is this Egil speaks?

EGIL

Egil, your lover, I!

THORDIS

The gods are mighty,
 And music is the lordliest. O Egil,
 Thou art emancipated, and to-morrow
 They will fling wide thy prison doors. — Good night!

[Giving him the harp.]

Keep here thy god with thee.

[At the door, as they clasp hands.]

Brother! — Good night.

[Exit.]

EGIL

Sister! — Emancipated! Mine at last
 Freedom and innocence! The occult beast
 That crouched beside the sweet wells of my spirit
 Is exorcised at last. — To-morrow dawn
 I shall go forth and taste the wild, spring air,
 And gather the hamlet children in the woods
 To pluck arbutus for her wedding-day,
 Her wedding-day — and his. I have renounced her.
 Emancipated — but I have renounced her
 Even for that, for freedom. What were freedom
 Without — his! his! forever his own! And I
 Am happy, rapt, triumphant? *His!* What power
 Hath wrought in me this ignominy?

[Lifting the harp.]

Thou!

Wast thou, imperious instrument! Wast thou,
 Delirious god!

[Fiercely he plucks out several strings.]

Thou hast decoyed me!

[Pausing.]

Still,

There's Yorul; Yorul's true.

*[Wrenching with both hands the harp's frame, he breaks it
 in halves, and exultant, raises them above his head,
 with a great breath.]*

Emancipated!

ACT THIRD

ACT III

SCENE: A forest glade

On the left, a green bank and a pool, back of which is a thicket; on the right, a vista, beneath boughs, of a distant volcano, rising through the wet light of dawn.

EGIL'S VOICE

[*Outside.*]

Help — O! help — O!

SHRILL VOICES

[*Outside.*]

A troll! a troll! a troll!

[*Enter, right, EGIL, running. He is completely surrounded and swarmed over by little children in bright spring garb. One little girl has climbed upon his shoulder, where she clings.*]

THE CHILDREN

Heigh! hold him fast. Troll! troll!

EGIL

Help, gentle greenwood!
Am I but now escaped men's prison walls
To fall into this ambush of thine elves!
Save me, you wrens and warblers! Fetch me wings!

THE CHILDREN

[*Taking hands, dance about him, singing.*]

Thrice, thrice,
 Thrice around thee !
 Star-wise
 Our steps surround thee ;
 Now yield thee, yield thee, proud Sir Troll !
 Body and soul
 Our spells have bound thee.

EGIL

Thrice, thrice,
 Thrice around me !
 Star-wise
 Your steps surround me.
 Now yield I me and pay my toll —
 Body and soul
 As ye have bound me.

[*He lies down, pretending death ; each child places his foot upon him, with a shout. At this he springs up, laughing, seizes a little boy and girl, and, seating himself on a log, places them on his knees. The others cluster about him.*]

Ha, sirrah ! is this maid thy sister ?

THE LITTLE BOY

Yes,
 She's mine.

EGIL

What wouldst thou do if I should steal her ?

THE LITTLE BOY
I'd kill you.

EGIL
Ha! wouldst let him?

THE LITTLE GIRL
Oh, of course;
He is my brother.

EGIL
'Tis a brother's right
To kill, I see.

THE LITTLE GIRL
In play, you know.

EGIL
In play.
THE CHILDREN
Come play! Come play!

EGIL
What now?

THE CHILDREN
[*Severally.*]

Fox and wild geese!
Glass-mountain, Spinning-fairy, Cat-skin, Crows,
Frog-bridegroom!

THE LITTLE GIRL
I know what!

EGIL
[*Takes both her hands, smiling.*]

Well, what?

THE LITTLE GIRL

Red Riding-hood, and you shall be the wolf.

I'll be

[*Egil drops her hands and rises.*]

THE LITTLE BOY

I'm the good hunter and these are my men.

EGIL

[*Vassal-like to the little boy.*]

Beseech you, sir, may I not play your part?

I'd fain be the good hunter.

THE LITTLE BOY

Granted, earl.

I'd fainer be the wolf.

[*To the children.*]

Come! gather your flowers.

EGIL

And when you've filled your laps and aprons up
With wind-flowers and arbutus, bring them here.
Mind! 'tis our lady Thordis' wedding-day.

THE CHILDREN

[*Running from the little boy.*]

The wolf! the wolf!

[*Passing left into the wood, they are seen for some time gathering flowers and watching, in their game, the stealthy approachments of the little boy.*]

EGIL

O freedom! happy world!

Hark, how they laugh, with bubbling undersong
Sweetening the over-choir of the birds.
And I — I, too, can laugh; can loose my soul
Free-wing'd into the open with a cry
Unfetter'd as a lark.

[*Looking up into the tree-tops, he laughs again.*]

O rarest laughter!
O medicine of the long-languish'd mind!
O welling of the heart's sweet waters up,
Washing the acid tang of cynic woe
Sere from the spirit's lips. O benison
Of innocence! And have I lived before
This hour? Is not this day creation's dawn?

[*Flinging himself upon the bank.*]

These children, with their lifted flowerlike faces,
These flowers, with their dewy childlike eyes,
These parting vapours on the golden hills,
Yea, all these leaves of little twinkling grass
Whose roots strike down to tears of yesterday —
Now shine like things immaculate, new-born,
And I, and they, like issue of one mother,
The offspring of an universal birth.
Oh, what exceeding power hath loveliness
For her beholder!

[*Where he lies thus rapt in the sylvan landscape, the first sunlight breaks through the wood, and by it the SHADOW of a man is thrown sharply, from the left, across the reclining form of Egi. At the same time, from the right, is heard Arfi's voice, singing.*]

THE VOICE OF ARFI

Thy heart, love, give or take

Or cast away ;

Mine shall not break

Forever and a day ;

For lovers kiss their mates where thoughts are kind.

Love lives within the mind — the mind — the mind.

[Slowly having risen to his feet, Egil perceives the human shadow and starts.]

EGIL

Yorul !

[The shadow recedes, left, from the scene.]

Yorul, stay !

Come back !

THE VOICE OF ARFI

The redstart and the rose,

The clear sunrise,

What mortal knows

Their grace to immortalise ?

Seek them again, where Death can never find,

By love, within the mind — the enamour'd mind.

EGIL

It must not be. — Yorul ! — What, I

Was mad, who now am sane and innocent.

Come back ! It shall not — Yorul !

THORDIS

[Calls outside.]

Egil !

EGIL

[*Pausing.*]

She!

[*Enter, right, THORDIS and ARFI. They are dressed in white, the dwarf being quaintly garlanded. They are followed by WULDOR. Thordis goes gaily toward Egil, extending both her hands.*]

THORDIS

Deserter! runagate! — Look, Arfi, here's
Our truant brought to bay. And will not yield!
And will not even surrender up his eyes
To his imploring gaolers. — O proud brother!
Not even a hand-clasp in return for all
Thy struck-off shackles?

[*Taking her hands, he still looks off left.*]

EGIL

Lady!

THORDIS

Still no eyes
For mortals? Quite enamoured of a wood-sprite?
Alas! we've broke a tryst and she has flown!
Call her: perchance she'll hear.

EGIL

[*Looking upon Thordis.*]

Lady! —

[*Quickly then turning away, speaks under his breath to Wuldor.*]

A word,

A word!

ARFI

He's deeply moved.

THORDIS

He's deeply changed.

Saw you his eyes when they turned full on me,
 And he said, "Lady"? There were tears in them,
 Tears, and yet through them glowed the ancient fire,
 Not now in wrath, but tenderness.

EGIL

[*Aside to Wuldor.*]

Overtake him;

The oath he swore to Egil — tell him — Egil
 Now countermands. Bid him do nothing; go!

[*Watches Wuldor off, left. Arfi, quietly looking at him,
 speaks to Thordis.*]

ARFI

You love him dearly?

THORDIS

Very dearly.

EGIL

Brother,

Thordis, your hands again!

ARFI

[*Smiling.*]

Have you despatched
 Wuldor to find the lady wood-sprite?

EGIL

Friends,

Were we less deeply known to one another,
 And chiefly I to you — what thing I was,
 What now, perchance, am grown — well, I suppose
 'Twere custom, were it not? to wreath our lips
 With honey-blossoms of superfluous
 Congratulation: you are to be wed,
 And I am free, and my emancipation
 Owes all itself to you. — “Heaven be with you!”
 “I thank you well,” “Joy is to me!” — But these
 Things being said, and rung with all the chimes
 Of truth, I beg of you let now these hands
 Speak the unsaid remainder for our hearts
 In silence.

[*The three hold hands.*]

ARFI

[*After a pause.*]

Vaster powers than we have wrought
 This friendship. Whom the gods join hand in hand
 Their fates thenceforth are mingled.

THORDIS

[*Loosening her hands with a laugh.*]

So, dear lord,

Be merry!

ARFI

[*Speaks low, with a smile.*]

Have I not divinest reason?
 This is the place.

THORDIS

Arfi! The sacred pool?

ARFI

The pool of Freyja — there! The wood-folk call it
 Her mirror, for they say that once i' the year,
 Ever at May-day, the fresh goddess comes
 To sit beside it with her elves, whilst they
 Comb her bright hair.

THORDIS

And then she peers within it?

ARFI

As you do now. — Sweetest, good-bye!

THORDIS

Good-bye?

But where are you going?

ARFI

The wood pathway to heaven.
 I'm going to hasten that laggard priest, your father,
 To make him make you mine.

EGIL

Stop! You're alone.

ARFI

Well?

EGIL

[*Embarrassed.*]

Will it be now?

ARFI

Am I not written large
With bridal runes? Hang not these garlands thick
As invocations from an inn-house gable?
“Here light ye down, fair guests! Light down, light
down,
Dear lady, at the sign of the ‘*Green Bridegroom!*’” —
Farewell, sweetheart. This day is clothed in green
For joy. I will return with Ingimund
As swift as longing.

EGIL

Stay; we must be wise.
You must not leave me here alone with her.

ARFI

Why? Are you not my brother?

EGIL

I am he
Who vowed against you hatred and revenge.

ARFI

Also you are my brother.

EGIL

I am he
That with a brutish fang struck at your life.

ARFI

Good-bye, dear brother.

EGIL

Wait! Was I not then
Your brother — *then*? Will not a brother lust?
A brother covet? Are not beauty, grace,
Lures to a brother's eyes? Are brothers' souls
By nature kin? Or is that name a spell
To render heart and mind innocuous
That else might murder, ravish? Oh, be not
So rash as put your trust in me because
I am your brother.

ARFI

[*Returning to Egil, embraces him.*]

Lad, keep this with you.
I would not be so rash as *not* to trust
In you a power more august than yourself
For all the joy and honour which this day
Holds out to me. — Adieu! This day is joy's.

[*Exit, right.*]

EGIL

Now we're alone. How is it with you — sister?

THORDIS

Strangely, my brother; how is it with you?

EGIL

O God!

How many waking dawns and desperate nights
Have I, in sharp imagination, moaned
For this sweet hour, to stand — as now
I stand — alone with you, in liberty.

THORDIS

And now that time has come.

[*She reaches to him her hand; he does not take it.*]

EGIL

Now it is come,
But ah ! how sternly different is this truth
From all I dreamed. Can this be freedom ? See !
What hangs upon these arms ? They wear no chains.
Why, then, do they not catch you breathless up
And bear you hence in rapture ? In your eyes —
Lo ! veiless I behold your virgin soul !
And yet she does not fly, nor I pursue.

THORDIS

What should she fear ?

EGIL

What should she not ? — These eyes
Renouncing hers ; these hands that dare not press
Her vesture's hem, lest they consume like coals
That robèd sanctuary ; these desires
That burn around her like the hedge of flames
Round Brunhild's bower ; this waiting dawn, this hush
And solitary wood — What fear ? Herself,
Herself that, all resolved to beauty, breathes
Herself unto these eyes, these hands, this dawn,
These leash'd desires !

THORDIS

You love me, you would say.
Why should you not ?

EGIL

I have renounced you.

THORDIS

Me,

But not your love for me. Surely that still
Is happiness.

EGIL

Why, yes, I must be happy;
For this is pain, and pain is very sweet
To those who love; and this is bitter sweet
To breathe the name of "sister" 'gainst your cheek
Where but so late the sigh of "sweetheart" stole
Warm from my brother's lips. — O lure and vision!
Do you not see? I have climbed up to you
Out of the rank abyss; this is the verge:
One word, one look, from you must hurl me back,
Or save me.

THORDIS

Look.

EGIL

How have you dared to trust me?

THORDIS

When have we ever ceased to trust you?

EGIL

"We"?

THORDIS

Arfi and I. Oh, he is very wise.
His judgment is as gracious as a child's
That in the wonderland of its own wisdom
Imagines nothing baser than itself.

EGIL

But I *am* baser.

THORDIS

Hath it proved so?

EGIL

[*After a pause.*]

No!

No; thanks to you and him and my own pain,
It shall not prove so. This at last is power
And innocence; this — this at last is freedom.
Now when I clasp your hand I clasp his also —
My saviour's; now beneath your face, for shrine,
I will confess my spirit to you both,
For are you not my gods? You have created
My heaven and hell, and builded my path heavenward.
Now from your eyes nothing — nothing within
This heart shall be concealed.

THORDIS

[*Smiling.*]

What then is your secret?

[*On the edge of the scene, left, unobserved by them, reappears the human SHADOW.*]

EGIL

[*Slowly rises.*]

My secret?

THORDIS

Come, sit with me on this bank,
And I will be a listening stream, a bird,
An opening flower, to overhear you.

*[He follows and sits beside her; the Shadow slowly moves
toward them.]*

EGIL

But —

THORDIS

That thought which falters now behind your lips.

EGIL

I have no thought which hides from you.

*[The Shadow moves between them. Egil starts up with
a cry.]*

Again!

Again it falls upon me!

THORDIS

What?

EGIL

'Tis gone.

THORDIS

What's gone?

EGIL

It is no matter.

THORDIS

A surprise!

I see : a wedding-day surprise for us.

EGIL

No, but a lie. I lied to you. Last night
I told you I renounced you, but I lied.

THORDIS

Egil!

EGIL

It was the music, the harp-demon ;
It blinded and then tempted me ; it lured me
To obtain my freedom falsely. But to-day,
This morning when my body fetterless
Roamed in this wood-side, and the little children
Climbed over me in laughter, and I too
Laughed with them, and all nature laughed and echoed
"Thou art emancipated!" — I was healed ;
Then I was healed and now all's well again ;
All's well ; no harm shall come to him.

THORDIS

To whom?

I do not understand.

EGIL

You have no need ;
I claim your own assurance. Will you trust me ?

THORDIS

So well that, now you have put your secret by,
I will tell mine.

EGIL

What secret can you have
For me?

THORDIS

You have been wicked ; so perhaps
Have I.

EGIL

[*Smiling.*]

You !

THORDIS

[*Showing her hand.*]

Look ! look there.

EGIL

A scar.

THORDIS

The mark

Of fangs.

EGIL

What thing has dared to give you pain ?

THORDIS

Have you forgot ?

EGIL

Ah me ! I had forgot.

Cannot you, too, forget ?

THORDIS

I would not ; that's

My secret. Yes, this scar is dear to me.

EGIL

That sign of blasphemy, of him — the werewolf —

THORDIS

Is dear to me.

EGIL

Thordis !

THORDIS

I loved the wolf.

It was a life to nourish and protect,
A being alien and mysterious,
Yearning and captive. It was terrible,
And yet so eager, swift, and passionate
It fascinated me. It was ignoble,
Cruel, yet infinite of promise ; cunning,
Malicious, yet beautifully animate,
Sublimely animal.

EGIL

O pain !

THORDIS

To take it

Into my bosom, foster its wild growth
From hour to hour, to watch from day to day
The fierce light of its eyes glow deeper, milder,
To nestle it only to set it free — these joys
Were pangs to me.

EGIL

[*Low.*]

Have pity !

THORDIS

Then it was

So lordly, so imperious of strength,

In grace so sinuous, in pride so ardent —
Who had not been enamoured of it?

EGIL

Cease !

It wrought some monstrous spell to make you wanton.

THORDIS

If that be wantonness which fain would take
No joy of loving but the giving joy.

EGIL

But for that beast you turned your thoughts from
Arfi ?

THORDIS

You do not understand ; Arfi and I
Are one ; it needs no murmured wedding vows
To make us that. But I am beautiful,
And all who look upon me love to press
Nearer and touch my gown, and when I pass
I feel the ruddy mantling of their cheeks
And the wild admiration start ; and these
Are joys to Arfi as to me, and we
Return their love.

EGIL

Even so you loved me ?

THORDIS

No,

More than all those, for you alone of those
Had need of me. — And so you have my secret.
I fear indeed it is a wicked one ;

For I have been like a too-doting nurse
That lets her heart hang backward in regret
And whispers her loved one, "Grow, but do not leave
me!"

EGIL

For what then have I grown, O gods?

THORDIS

For this :

To be yourself, and free of that nurse-bondage.

EGIL

Free ! but alone, adrift ! Oh, take me back
Into the bosom of your care. Once more
Nestle me there, the wild thing !

THORDIS

That once more

So you might struggle for your freedom ? Nay,
The wild thing now is dead.

[Enter Wuldor, left; he goes to Egil.]

WULDOR

I cannot speak

With him. When I approached, he fled from me,
Silent. I called, but both his hands he pressed
Over his ears, and silently among
The trees eluded me.

EGIL

[Seizing Wuldor's wrists, speaks huskily.]

I have not willed this ;

They cannot lay this crime on me — these gods,

For I have annulled it, I have cancelled it.
Come here, look in my heart; is it not clean?
Woe thou mayest see there, yearning, pain, but not —
Say, canst thou see there — murder? Answer not,
But go! What will come *will* come; what have I
To do with it? Go, go, I say.

[*Exit Wuldor, right, looking darkly.*]

THORDIS

You are ill,
Your gestures — they are wild.

EGIL

Why should they not be?
The wild thing is not dead, but is exalted.
Gods, why should we, your hinds, coin and devise
Dreams of emancipation! We are quibblers
And hypocrites, damned, every slave of us,
To hug our chains in secret. Rather than
Acknowledge what we are, the mind outwits
The heart, the heart hoodwinks the mind, the tongue
Cajoles and counterplots them both, while truth —

[*Breaks into laughter.*]

THORDIS

Tell me the truth.

EGIL

Again? Another version?
Why, listen then: I love you; not in the awful,
Serene idea of self-sacrifice,
But passion, which of right demands return

Of passion, nature's just and ancient barter.
I want you ; I demand you — all yourself.
I offer all myself.

THORDIS

What of your brother ?

EGIL

I ask you nothing which he does not ask.
He offers nothing which I do not offer.
There was a difference between us once,
Not now.

THORDIS

Hath he not made you what you are ?

EGIL

Yes, he and you.

THORDIS

And in requital now
You would seduce his bride ?

EGIL

No, not seduce ;
Demand. Yes, though I seem to rave, I speak
Love and conviction. Judge me, dear my lady.
You chose between us brothers when we were
Contrasted in our souls as some meek bard
Of pity, with a beast. Look on us now
Again, before it be too late, and choose
Between us now.

THORDIS

I have chosen once for all.

EGIL

But have you chosen blindly ?

[*Points into the wood.*]

Do you see,
By yonder pine, that wild crab-apple tree ?

THORDIS

I see a tree just bursting into flower.

EGIL

Is not it beautiful ?

THORDIS

'Tis ravishing.

EGIL

Last winter, had you passed, you might have seen it
Writhing its frozen limbs there like a thing
Accurst, all pinched and scrambled by the pangs
Of screaming winds ; you would have shrunk from it
Beneath the verdurous pine, in whose sad boughs
The same winds sung like voices of tuned lyres.

THORDIS

It may be so.

EGIL

Yet now behold it, now !
A pale-rose pyre of fragrance and of flame,
Wherein, like sacrificial spirits, sit
The tawny and vermilion birds, and strike
Their silvery chants in unison, and hung
Amid the tangled bloom, in murmurous choirs,
The blazing gold bees shrill their mellow horns.

Look, Thordis, look again ! If you were Freyja,
Herself, goddess of spring, which would you choose
For shelter now, and joy ?

THORDIS

[*Gazing at him.*]

Ah me !

EGIL

If spring —

If spring and the sweet south can so transform,
What cannot love ? Your warmth, your breath, your
soul,

Soft on my numbness, my deformity,
Breathed, and I sprung — a burning tree of bloom —
Beside you. Have you eyes for flights unseen ?
Hearing for choirs unheard ? Here, too, beside you
Fierce swarms of golden fancies work in song
The fecund pollen of my passion, here
A thousand bird-wing'd visions nest them down
Into the heart of me, to chant your praise.
You that have so transformed me, you repulse me
Now ?

[*Enter right, in the background, Arfi ; he pauses unseen.*]

THORDIS

Take your eyes from mine.

EGIL

You love me ; you
Who fostered me, the wild thing, love me still.
My secret scar is on you ; you are mine,
Not his.

THORDIS

Oh, leave me!

EGIL

Yet you seize my hand.

THORDIS

Leave me, leave me!

EGIL

Yet you take me to your heart.

THORDIS

A myriad loves the heart hath, but one mate.
Once only may the cry of soul and body
Be answered; the great need can be but once.

EGIL

Now is the great need come.

THORDIS

How may we know?

EGIL

I am your being's master. If his soul
Were listening to us now, I would cry out:
"I have outgrown thee, brother. What thou art
I am and more, for I have wrung from thee
Thy potent mind, and forged it to my passions
To make a lordlier instrument. Mine, therefore,
Not thine, the ordained need of her. Mine!"

THORDIS

Love me!

[*He kisses her. Arfi moves into the thicket and disappears.
Thordis, putting Egil from her, draws a dagger upon
herself.*]

Ah, my betrayer! It is ended.

EGIL

[*Seizing the knife from her.*]

No;

You shall not choose so. If that name indeed
Be mine, keep silence now, while I avenge
The kiss of thy seducer.

[*As he turns the knife upon himself, Thordis cries out.*]

THORDIS

Egil!

EGIL

Love!

[*Springing to her, beside the pool, he recoils.*]

Impending image! persecuting shape!
Depart.

THORDIS

Alas! are we both mad?

EGIL

Remove

The prying horror of thine eyes. Not now —
At this the utmost instant of my joy
Intrude not now.

THORDIS

Whom do you speak to?

EGIL

[Staring past Thordis into the pool.]

There!

Look, we have murdered him. It comes to tell us;
 It points at thee, to say thou, too, art guilty.
 We have betrayed and killed him, thou and I.
 See, see! It kneels and craves our sanction. — Rise,
 Remorseless shadow! Go! I give it thee.

*[He hurls the dagger into the pool. As he staggers back,
 Thordis rests his head on her shoulder.]*

THORDIS

Peace, brain and heart!

VOICES

[Far away, right, sing.]

How should the bed, the bridal bed,
 Freyja, be spread?
 Pine garlands at the foot, rose garlands at the head.

EGIL

Is it gone?

THORDIS

Nothing is there.

Rest, rest, poor dreamer!

THE VOICES

[*Sing.*]

What on the maid, the bride and maid,
Freyja, be laid?
The rose's innocence, ere those fresh garlands fade.

EGIL

Hark! the bridal virgins!

[*Thordis shrinks from him.*]

Stay, Thordis; now the awful need is come.
While yet we are alone in the great silence,
Now, now, before they find it, pale and red,
Heaped in the path of roses, now — be mine.

THORDIS

Freyja, help me! Freyja, goddess and maiden!

EGIL

His soul descends upon us both, and seals
This act with blood of sacrifice. His blood
Our nuptial rite hath reddened.

THORDIS

Save me!

EGIL

Hush!

This is the vernal god, the appalling arm
That clasped the world i' the primal age, and
moaned —
“Let there be life!” — Hush, love; do not you hear
The stealing saps stir through the forest, feel

The seeking joys of all wild, mating things
Throb in their blood and ours, their kindred, —

THORDIS

[*Breaking from him.*]

Help!

Help, Arfi!

[*She escapes, right, into the wood. As Egil pursues her, there steps from the thicket, into his path, Arfi. Egil pauses.*]

EGIL

May the dead be summoned back
To curse us with forgiveness? — Spirit, be stern
And not compassionate. Come in your wounds,
Fell and disfigured, not benignly thus.
Oh, not your love — your vengeance! Not your love!

[*Shields his eyes with his arms. As he does so, Arfi, with a serene gesture, is about to speak, when from the thicket Yorul springs silently out and stabs him. Arfi falls motionless; Yorul withdraws. Slowly Egil looks again.*]

Yea, now thou hast resumed thy murder-garment,
And hast drawn on thy bridal-robe of wounds,
And laid thee at my feet in vengeance. Now
This is indeed thy vengeance — brother! master!

[*Stoops beside the body.*]

VOICES OF THE VIRGINS

[*Sing, near.*]

What o'er the man the maid shall wed,
Freyja, be shed?

The pine's immortal breath, ere those green boughs
are dead.

[*Starting up, fearful, Egil hales the body toward the left, but having reached the centre pauses, as the laughter of children rises in the way before him. Turning, he is dragging the body down scene, when the children, scampering in, left, with their aprons and baskets full of wild flowers, run towards him. Finger on lip, he motions them silence; their laughter and shouts die away, awed.*]

EGIL

He is asleep; the bridegroom is asleep.
Scatter your wild flowers over him. Look, he smiles,
He'll laugh when he awakes and sees them. — Soft!

THE CHILDREN

[*Whispering, gather in a circle and, pleased as at some game of mystery, heap the flowers upon Arfi, and sing low.*]

Flowers bring
And fairy numbers!
Sweet Spring
His spirit cumbers.
Still be highhole! still be thrush!
Hush! hush!
Now he slumbers.

[*Treading softly, with covert laughter and "hushes," the children steal away. Heaped over the body of Arfi and completely concealing it, they have left behind them a great pile of arbutus, violets, and other flowers. Some of these Egil is replacing more carefully, when the pile is shaken from within, and up through it rises the form of BALDUR. Dazzled, Egil kneels.*]

BALDUR

Hail, brother !

EGIL

Art thou sunlight, or a voice ?

BALDUR

This is the word of Odin !

[*Egil sinks prostrate.*]

If the wolf

Seduce to his desire his brother's bride,
He shall be lord with her of heaven and earth
And hell, and by their passion the serene
And stablished beacons of the gods shall be
Eclipsed in night, anarchical and void,
Where, staggering with lust, the blinded world
Reels back to chaos and the primal dark.

EGIL

[*Hiding his face.*]

And if the wolf renounce her ?

BALDUR

He shall perish,
Slain by his own self-mastery, and all
The spirits of light, freed from that awful dread,
Shall strew his charnel, singing.

EGIL

Ah ! but she —

BALDUR

She falters yet ; she hangs upon his will.
The lure of imperfection is the sin
Of gods, the lure of godhood that of mortals.
She wavers still.

EGIL

Bright shadow, golden voice,
Say what thou art.

BALDUR

Baldur, the son of Odin.

EGIL

[Starts up.]

Then I — ?

BALDUR

Fenris, the wolf-god !

[He sinks again into the flowers, and is gone.]

EGIL

Ah ! the dream !

The dream is true ; the truth is visionary.

[From the left, two or three of the children return from the wood, and stand silent. From the right, the lutes and pipes of the bridal procession grow louder, and shortly enter the virgins, INGIMUND, Thordis, Wuldor, and others, as Egil still stands lost in soliloquy.]

“ And there, in slumber, even as mortals dream,
Slumb’ring, that they are bright, immortal gods,
You shall be mortals, and shall walk as men,
Forgetful of your immortality.”

THORDIS

Was not he with you, father ?

INGIMUND

He went before

A little space, to greet you first. — My child,
Why do you cling to me ?

EGIL

[*Approaching her.*]

Goddess and maiden !

THORDIS

He's mad. Save us ! We both are mad.

INGIMUND

Thy brother,

Where is he ?

EGIL

Father, he hath gone before
A little space, but left thy word with me.

INGIMUND

My word ?

EGIL

The word of truth.

[*A little girl, moving back some of the flowers, has disclosed
the dead body of Arfi, blood-stained.*]

THE LITTLE GIRL

He's still asleep.

THORDIS

[Goes to it with a cry.]

Arfi !

WULDOR

I thought it, Ingimund ; he's murdered.

INGIMUND

His bane ! What hand struck this ?

EGIL

Lo, I will tell ;
The dream must end. Thou saidest : He shall perish,
And all the spirits of light, freed from that dread,
Shall strew his charnel, singing.

INGIMUND

Madman ! Thou —

YORUL

[Entering from the thicket.]

I murdered him.

THORDIS

[Starting up from the body.]

Yorul !

YORUL

[Showing dagger.]

His blood is here.

EGIL

Yet shall the dreamers wake, the truth prevail.

YORUL

'Twas I ! This hand —

EGIL

And shall that hand put out
The beacons of the gods with primal dark,
And hurl the blinded world to chaos ?

THORDIS

Egil !

Thou art innocent ! Oh, in this blank of death
That truth remains.

EGIL

[*Turning upon Yorul.*]

Scourge and seductor !

INGIMUND

[*To Egil.*]

Speak !

Hath this man done this deed ?

EGIL

[*Slowly.*]

Yes ; it was Yorul.

[*Yorul is seized.*]

ACT FOURTH

ACT IV

SCENE: The rune-stone.

*A white-rose bush, beside it, in bloom ; a flame on the altar ;
sunset.*

Enter EGIL, alone.

EGIL

Put it away? To put all from me — all —
Or else despoil! Renounce, or with a kiss
Consume the bright seduction! Mar — relinquish,
In either path, to suffer ; yet to see
Myself at last for what I am, to know
The inexorable bars, the nudging rafters,
The starry lych-gate and the pit of tears
Of this my soul and penthouse. — And the escape!
To know that I — myself the miracle
I worshipped — am a god, a sovereign lord
Of nature, powerful to make the bounds
And marches of the heaven my petty fiefs
Of mind, — yet what a god! A clawed usurper,
That snatches from the shoulders of the gods
The green and azure cloth of summer-time,
This human tapestry of spring and harvest
Star-wrought with sanguine hearts and golden sheaves,
And tears it, tooth-meal, for a wolf's lair. — This,

This also must have challenge : Might not Egil
O'ermaster Fenris ? Can the mind o'ermaster
The will ?

[*Supplicating the rune-stone.*]

O mystery, that made us two
Yet one, resolve thyself and this and seal it !
To put all, all away, or with a kiss consume ?

[*Pausing, he breaks a white rose, and holding it near and nearer the altar-flame watches it—as though for a sign—till it scorches; then snatching it back, extinguishes the flame. While he is bending over thus, THORDIS enters,—in her hands a rope of twined arbutus-flowers. All in white, she is very pale; approaching behind Egil, she watches over his shoulder the rose petals and the flame. Suddenly, throwing the rope of arbutus over his head, she winds it about him. Turning, he drops the rose, and they gaze at each other, anguished.*]

EGIL

[*After a silence.*]

Why have you left the body ?

THORDIS

[*Binding his arms down with the blossoms.*]

I have come
To bring you back in chains to prison.

EGIL

Where—

THORDIS

I know a dungeon where the dead are not.

But so it is ; the storm of thee shuts down
Over my world ; thy lightnings have put out
His smile.

EGIL

Is it not enough that I have spilled
His blood upon my soul, but must that, more,
Pollute the whiteness of a goddess' heart
And desecrate perfection ?

THORDIS

[*With a wan smile of pain, drawing him with the arbutus
toward her.*]

Come — to prison.

EGIL

His blood, I said ; did you not hear ? Not Yorul —
I murdered him !

THORDIS

You do not understand ;
It was not you ; 'twas I.

EGIL

The hand of Yorul
Stabbed him, but my intent.

THORDIS

You do not ask
Where I've prepared your dungeon. — Come.

EGIL

You precious chains ! I am free.

Too late,

THORDIS

Thy words again !
“Free, but alone, adrift!” I hear thee still,
Forever, calling in thy need of me—
“O take me back, the wild thing!” Come!—I take
thee;
I nestle thee once more, a captive. Come,
Alone no more!

EGIL

It is too late. 'Tis he,
Your god and lover, whom they are bringing back
To claim you.

THORDIS

[*Clinging to him.*]

Who shall claim me from your side?

[*Enter a procession of folk, virgins, and children, bearing a low bier, covered with a cloth of green, behind which walks YORUL, bound. INGIMUND, who enters first, ascends, by the stone steps, the altar, before which the bier is set down. While this is being borne, the dirge continues.*]

VIRGINS AND CHILDREN

[*Chant.*]

Heiri! heiri! heiri!

Othin ok Æsir!

[*Ingimund signs to a priest to loosen the hands of Yorul, who stands in front of the bier.*]

INGIMUND

Give him the cup. The murderer shall drink
The bane of murder.

[*The priest hands to Yorul a cup, which, as he raises it quietly to his lips, is wrenched from his hand by Egil, who embraces him.*]

EGIL

My deliverer! —

Brother, awake! I give thee back thy bride.

[*On the bier, the green cloth is thrown back, and BALDUR, rising, steps upon the altar. THORDIS gazes upon him.*]

This is my heart's desire — take it! 'tis yours.

BALDUR

Freyja!

THORDIS

[*With a wild cry, going to him.*]

Baldur!

THE FOLK

[*Prostrating themselves.*]

The gods! the gods!

[*Thordis and Ingimund, by Baldur's side, are transfigured, and a hedge of flowers and flame springs up before the altar, encircling the three.*]

EGIL

[*Apart, drinks from the cup.*]

To freedom!

[*Baldur and Thordis, clinging to each other, look at Egil.*]

YORUL

[Staring at Baldur, speaks to Egil.]

Whom, lord, dost thou name "brother"?

EGIL

Him — and thee,
Both, for through me henceforward you are kindred.
Yorul! my men, my liegemen! you — you also
Conceived in chains and born in passion, you
Also, who from an immemorial brute
Rage for emancipation, oh, forget not
Your brother Fenris, him who was brought forth
A glorious miscarriage of the gods,
To be exalted to a man.

[He sinks upon the bier.]

The chains!

Yorul — the chains!

[Striving to break the arbutus links, which hang loosely upon him, he falls back.]

YORUL

Master!

ODIN

The wolf is tamed.

*[In sudden fire, the gods disappear, leaving deep twilight.
Vague, the body of Egil lies dead on the bier.]*

*Beside it, amid the prostrate folk, rising alone, stands
Yorul, with arms upreached toward the rune-stone.]*

THE VIRGINS AND CHILDREN

[*Singing.*]

Heiri! heiri! heiri!
Balthur ok Freyja!

[*Far off, the ice-crown of the volcano flushes in the
afterglow.*]

FINIS

+

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